



Building everyday connection with a person living with dementia

**Dementia Support
Australia**



Dementia Support Australia

Funded by the Australian Government
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**Download the free activity
planning worksheet**
dementia.com.au/connections



Why connection matters

In some cases, people living with dementia can experience isolation and reduced opportunities for meaningful interaction with people within their family, friends and communities.

By focusing on spending time together with patience and understanding it can:

- Strengthen emotional wellbeing
- Reduce anxiety and distress
- Support identity and dignity
- Improve quality of life

Connection does not require perfection. It requires presence.



Start with listening

Why it matters

Listening communicates:

“You matter. I value what you are saying.”

What to do

- Sit at eye level.
- Reduce background noise.
- Allow the person to speak at their own pace.
- Be comfortable with silence.
- Focus on emotion, not accuracy.

If stories are repeated

- Respond to the feeling behind the story.
- Avoid correcting factual errors.
- Acknowledge what matters to them.

Connection is built through validation, not correction.

Encourage reminiscence

Why it matters

Long-term memories often remain stronger than recent ones.

Talking about earlier life:

- Reinforces identity
- Builds confidence
- Strengthens relationships

What to do

- Ask about family roles, work, hobbies or achievements.
- Use photos or familiar objects.
- Allow the person to speak at their own pace.
- Be gently curious.
- Follow their lead.

Examples:

- “What was your favourite job?”
- “Tell me about your children when they were young.”
- “How did you meet your partner?”

Avoid testing memory.
Focus on shared enjoyment.



Helpful Tip

Be mindful that reminiscence may present upsetting memories. If this happens, acknowledge feelings and offer a break.

The Five S's

People living with dementia may experience changes in memory, processing speed or hearing.

The Five S's provide a simple framework.



SLOW

- Speak at a calm pace.
- Pause between sentences.
- Allow extra time for responses

Tip: Silence is not failure. It is processing time.



SIMPLE

- One idea at a time.
- Short sentences.
- Avoid complex explanations

Instead of: "After lunch we'll get ready to go out and then see the doctor."

Try: "After lunch we will see the doctor."



SPECIFIC

- Speak at a calm pace.
- Pause between sentences.
- Allow extra time for responses

Instead of: "He said she would bring it."

Try: "John said Mary will bring the book."



SHOW

- Use gestures.
- Point to objects.
- Offer visual choices

If asking: “Would you like the blue cardigan?”

Show the cardigan. Visual cues support understanding.



SMILE

A calm, warm expression can:

- Reduce anxiety
- Signal safety
- Reinforce reassurance

Non-verbal communication remains powerful even when language changes.

Avoid rushing to give advice

People living with dementia still value:

- Autonomy
- Respect
- Being consulted

What to do

- Ask for their opinion.
- Invite their expertise.
- Acknowledge their life experience.

Examples:

- “You’ve always been good at gardening. What would you suggest?”
- “How would you handle this?”

Being asked can restore a sense of purpose.



Sharing news and information

Sharing parts of your life can strengthen connection.

Consider:

- The nature of your relationship
- The person's emotional resilience
- Whether the information may cause distress

Keep information:

- Simple
- Positive where possible.
- Relevant to shared interests.



Meaningful activities to do together

Familiar activities often feel safe and achievable.

Meaningful activity can support:

- Emotional wellbeing
- Identity and dignity
- Reduced anxiety and agitation
- Improved engagement
- Sense of purpose

The most effective activities are:

- Familiar
- Failure-free
- Sensory-based
- Relational rather than performance-based

Focus on enjoyment, not outcome.





Reminiscence activities

Why it works

Long-term memories are often more accessible than recent memories.

Reminiscence therapy is associated with improved mood and reduced distress.

Ideas

- Look through old photos together.
- Create a simple “life story” scrapbook.
- Discuss favourite holidays, work roles or traditions.
- Handle familiar objects (tools, recipe books, medals, fabrics).
- Watch clips of historical events from their era.



Helpful Tip

Avoid correcting factual details.
Follow the emotion behind the story.



Practising music and rhythm

Why it works

Music activates widespread brain networks, including those linked to memory and emotion.

It can reduce agitation and improve mood.

Ideas

- Play music from the persons teens or early adulthood.
- Sing familiar songs together.
- Clap or tap along to rhythm.
- Create a personalised playlist.
- Attend small live music sessions if available.



Helpful Tip

Volume should be comfortable. Watch for emotional responses both positive and overwhelming.

Introduce gentle physical movement

Why it works

Movement supports circulation, mood regulation and sleep.

Physical activity has been shown to reduce behavioural symptoms.

Ideas

- Short walks outdoors.
- Chair-based exercises.
- Light stretching.
- Gardening (watering plants, light pruning).
- Simple ball toss games.



Helpful Tip

Match activity to energy levels. Keep instructions short and model movements



Cognitive stimulation activities

Based on principles of Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST).

Why it works

Structured mental engagement can help maintain thinking skills and increase social interaction.

Ideas

- Word association games.
- Sorting tasks (buttons by colour, cards by suit).
- Simple quizzes about shared topics.
- Category games (“Name types of fruit”).
- Matching picture cards.



Helpful Tip

Keep it light. Avoid testing memory directly.



Creative expression

Why it works

Creative expression reduces stress and supports non-verbal communication.

Creative activities support emotional processing and identity.

Ideas

- Painting or drawing (no right or wrong outcome).
- Crafting (knitting, collage, simple woodworking sanding).
- Flower arranging.
- Cooking or baking familiar recipes.
- Poetry reading or writing short reflections.



Helpful Tip

Focus on the experience, not the outcome. Offer encouragement without correcting or judging.



Sensory engagement

Why it works

Sensory input can regulate the nervous system and reduce agitation.

This can be particularly helpful when verbal skills are reduced.

Ideas

- Hand massage with scented lotion.
- Holding textured fabrics.
- Aromatherapy (lavender, citrus).
- Pet therapy or interacting with animals (real or robotic).
- Listening to nature sounds.
- Handling warm towels.



Helpful Tip

Introduce one sensory element at a time and observe their response before adding more.



Introduce purposeful tasks (Montessori-based approach)

Why it works

Research supports giving meaningful, achievable roles as it restores a sense of usefulness and competence.

Ideas

- Folding laundry.
- Preparing lunch or dinner
- Setting the table.
- Watering plants.
- Sorting cutlery.
- Organising drawers.
- Polishing surfaces with supervision.



Helpful Tip

Break tasks into simple steps and offer guidance only when needed to support independence.



Shared reading and storytelling

Why it works

Supports connection and shared attention.

Ideas

- Read short news articles.
- Look at large-print books.
- Read aloud poetry.
- Create simple shared stories together.



Helpful Tip

Pause regularly and allow time for response – connection matters more than finishing the story.



Games and structured play

Why it works

Encourages social interaction without heavy cognitive demand.

Ideas

- Cards or dominoes.
- Jigsaw puzzles with larger pieces.
- Bingo.
- Board games adapted to simpler rules.
- Balloon volleyball.



Helpful Tip

Adapt the rules to suit the person's abilities and keep the focus on enjoyment rather than competition.



Technology-supported engagement

Why it works

When appropriate, the use of technology can aid in creating connections.

Ideas

- Digital photo frames.
- Tablet apps designed for dementia-friendly games.
- Video calls with family.
- Watching familiar films or documentaries.



Helpful Tip

Keep interfaces simple and avoid over-stimulation.



How to choose the right activity

Ask yourself:

- Is it familiar?
- Is it achievable?
- Is it enjoyable?
- Does it match their energy levels today?
- Does it support dignity?

Be flexible. What works one day may not work the next.



What matters most

It is not the activity itself that creates connection. It is:

Shared attention

Emotional safety

Respect

Presence

Meaningful moments often come from simple, everyday interactions.



Activity planner

Supporting meaningful moments throughout the day

HOW ARE THEY FEELING TODAY?



Calm



Restless



Tired



Social



Withdrawn



Anxious

ENERGY LEVEL

Low

Medium

High

ACTIVITY IDEAS



Music & Rhythm



Reminiscence



Gentle Movement & Outdoors



Cognitive Activities



Creative Expression



Purposeful Tasks



Reading & Storytelling



Sensory Engagement



Games & Play



Technology Connection

ASK YOURSELF

- Is it familiar?
- Is it enjoyable?
- Is it achievable?
- Does it match their energy levels today?
- Does it support dignity?



Be flexible.

What works one day may not work the next

TODAY I WANT TO SUPPORT



Calm



Comfort



Engagement



Familiarity



Confidence



Purpose



Movement



Creativity



Social Connection

BEST TIME OF DAY



Morning



Midday



Afternoon



Evening

THE FIVE S'S

A simple reminder for everyday communication.



SLOW

Speak at a calm pace.



SIMPLE

One idea at a time.



SPECIFIC

Use names and concrete words.



SHOW

Use gestures and visual cues.



SMILE

Warm expressions build connection and reassurance.



Date: _____



Person's name: _____

PLAN YOUR DAY - FOCUS ON CONNECTION, NOT OUTCOME

MORNING



Activity

Response



Calm



Engaged



Enjoyed



Neutral



Overwhelmed

Notes

MIDDAY



Activity

Response



Calm



Engaged



Enjoyed



Neutral



Overwhelmed

Notes

AFTERNOON



Activity

Response



Calm



Engaged



Enjoyed



Neutral



Overwhelmed

Notes

EVENING



Activity

Response



Calm



Engaged



Enjoyed



Neutral



Overwhelmed

Notes

WHAT MATTERED MOST TODAY?



Shared attention



Emotional safety



Respect



Presence

Meaningful moment today...

THEY RESPONDED WELL TO...



Music



Humour



Touch



Familiar routines



Quiet



Company

Other: _____



Connection is built through **presence**, **patience** and **understanding**.



Looking after yourself

Supporting someone else requires energy, so looking after yourself matters.

Weekly wellbeing check

- Moved your body?
- Slept enough?
- Eaten well?
- Drunk enough water?
- Connected with a friend?
- Spent time outdoors?
- Taken quiet time?
- Practised slow breathing?
- Asked for help?

Small daily actions protect long-term resilience.



Mindful Moments care cards

Our Mindful Moments care cards, offer practical tips, creative ideas and encouragement for self-care. Visit www.dementia.com.au/mindfulmoments for more information.



Be social, arrange a catch-up

Take time for a casual catch-up. A simple conversation can strengthen relationships and brighten your day.



Mindful Moments

Wellbeing care cards

gentle reminders to raise personal wellbeing



When you need additional support

Supporting someone living with dementia can be complex.

Dementia Support Australia works with carers and care networks to:

- Understand changes in behaviour
- Identify contributing factors
- Build capability
- Improve quality of life

With over 350 consultants nationwide, support is tailored to each person's needs.

Call: 1800 699 799

Visit: dementia.com.au

If you need mental health support, speak with your GP or contact:

- Lifeline **13 11 14**
- Beyond Blue **1300 22 4636**
- 13YARN **13 92 76**
- MensLine **1300 78 99 78**
- Griefline **1300 845 745**
- Suicide Call Back Service **1300 659 467**
- Friend Line **1800 424 287**
- MindSpot **1800 61 44 34**



Understanding Dementia
A guide for families and carers

What to do when you suspect someone has dementia
A guide for families and carers

How to get help and support
A guide for families and carers

SUPPORT

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The information in this guide is not intended to replace medical care by a qualified professional. Every person living with dementia is unique. They may show different signs across many behaviours relating to pain, infection or even side effects of medication.

Support should always be tailored to meet a person's individual needs.

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**Contact us 24-hours a
day, 365 days a year
or live chat with us now
on our website**



1800 699 799



dementia.com.au