

FACT SHEET

CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH DEMENTIA

Dementia is a broad term used to describe a number of progressive neurological disorders. There are many different types of dementia and some people may present with a combination of types. Regardless of which type is diagnosed, each person will experience their dementia in their own unique way.

Sadly, the numbers of people diagnosed with having dementia is increasing year on year, but more positively there is now a lot of information on how to support people living with the disease. Many people are recognising that, if at all possible, people with dementia benefit from remaining in their own environment for as long as it is practical to do so. This is where live-in care provides a life line for many families.

Our approach at Arbour Companions & Care is to get to know the person with dementia and to listen carefully to everything that families and the client him/herself can tell us about their past – their jobs, interests, hobbies and sports; their likes and dislikes and the people who have been important to them in their lives. Not only does this give us valuable knowledge about the individual as a person, it helps us to create an activity programme that will have some meaning for the client. It also helps us to understand much of the behaviour that might be difficult and gives us an idea about how to manage those potentially challenging situations.

Communicating with a person living with dementia

Communicating with someone with dementia is probably the most difficult of challenges. The following tips have helped us a lot in the past and might help you if you are facing a similar dilemma.

Tips on communication with people living with dementia

- Start by putting time aside to talk to the person with dementia – don't give passing comments as that just confuses them.
- Try to find a quiet place to talk, sit down with them and lightly touch their arm to see if they feel comfortable with this
- Keep eye contact but don't stare continuously at them – focus on the area between their eyes.
- Say their name clearly, smile and speak slowly in short sentences, using clear straightforward words.

- If you are asking them to choose something -perhaps what they might like to eat, offer them a choice of two, perhaps three things at the most, and be clear about what you are asking of them .
- Try not to use too many open ended questions
- If they use a hearing aid, check that the battery is working!

Some common problems and how to help

What do I do when my mother keeps asking to see Dad – he died 5 years ago?

This is very common and no two authorities give the same advice. I advise that you don't remind them every time they ask that he is dead. I usually distract the person and always give them a hug as it might be that they are looking for some comfort.

How do I help my mum find the right word – it distresses her so much when she can't complete a sentence?

Give it time and try to have on hand books with pictures of familiar names. Remove any distractions such as a TV on constantly in the background

How do I reassure my mum that she is in her home even though she keeps asking to go home?

Again remove distractions and ask her to tell you about her home – then show her some of the things that she associates with her home – perhaps the teapot that she always uses, pictures on her mantelpiece

My mum sometime gets very sad and angry for no apparent reason

It's always a good idea to recognise with the persons how they are feeling, so you might start the conversation by saying – “you look sad today”.

This could be a sign of confusion caused by an illness. Check her temperature and call the GP to discuss her condition.

She might be uncomfortable – check where she is sitting– is there a draft or irritating noise.

Check to see if she has any bruises or unusual swelling which might be caused by arthritis -again check with the GP and/or the District Nurse to see if she needs treatment and or painkillers

It's useful to ask mum if he is feeling sad/angry etc. to help her to validate her feelings.

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