

Tips for caring from a distance

Caring for someone can be stressful and isolating when you can't be present all the time. This Sheet considers some of the issues you may face when you live a long distance from a family member, relative or friend with dementia and you are unable to make as regular direct contact as you would wish. Families, carers and friends can still make valuable contributions despite the barrier of distance.

Tips for families, friends and carers

Whether you live on the other side of town, in a city or rural community, interstate or overseas you can still support a person with dementia. You will need to be organised and think of ways to overcome the distance barrier. Here are a few tips that you may find useful.

1. Be prepared

Develop a plan for staying in touch, providing support through other people, obtaining regular reports on the person's welfare, resolving crises and making visits when you can. Talk to other long-distance carers and develop a knowledge of dementia that you can use when talking to family or friends who may live closer.

2. Keep the communication going

Stay in touch – let the person with dementia know that you care. Consider sending postcards, photos, short letters, small gifts or flowers.

Establish a phone routine so that you call at around the same time of the day. When you are on the phone to a person with dementia note that verbal communication becomes increasingly difficult as the dementia progresses and adjust your techniques. Make phone calls short. Note that information provided to you may sometimes be inaccurate. What appears to be a crisis over the phone, may not always be so. Have a plan for dealing with these situations.

Develop good communication principles. Read the Help Sheet *Caring for someone with dementia 1: Communication*.

3. Build a caring support network

Arrange support via family, friends, support groups or counsellors. Try to establish a good relationship with a family member who lives nearby.

Try to arrange family meetings to sort out roles and responsibilities. Try to work together to agree on criteria that may trigger the need to get together to discuss major decisions if circumstances change.

Ask other local people to act as supportive observers. Try to arrange for local council, clubs or churches to

provide other supports such as visiting, meals, social contact or transport.

If the person lives in residential aged care, develop a good relationship with staff so that they will know when to keep you informed.

4. Visit when you can

Try to arrange your visits to give local family members some respite from caring, and keep in touch through regular phone calls or email.

If you are travelling long distances and can only visit on occasions, allow time for you to meet with service providers after your visit. Ask for feedback and provide them with your observations.

5. Plan ahead

Try to anticipate what care strategies may be required to prevent a crisis and identify a person you can trust to accurately assess a situation and provide you with advice. Compile a list of help that's available in the area and consider redirecting mail to someone who will be responsible for the person's finances. Setting up legal, financial and medical arrangements may require a Power of Attorney. Get consent to talk to the person's doctor or talk to an Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) rather than trying to assess changes from a distance.

For more information on help and services in your local area, please visit the website myagedcare.gov.au

6. Look after yourself

It is not always possible to be with the person you love all the time. Know that you do make a difference.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at dementia.org.au



Interpreter

For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**

National Dementia Helpline **1800 100 500**

dementia.org.au