

## ACE for first responders

**Awareness: recognise the signs of dementia**

*Start by observing.*

Sign of dementia	What to look for
Confused and forgetful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusion about the time or place.</li> <li>• Difficulty following instructions or answering simple questions.</li> <li>• Repeating questions or stories.</li> </ul>
Difficulty communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggles to find words or form coherent sentences.</li> <li>• Vague or confused responses.</li> </ul>
Unusual behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wandering or appearing lost.</li> <li>• Anxiety, fear, or sudden agitation.</li> <li>• Suspicion or paranoia.</li> <li>• Unresponsiveness or withdrawal.</li> <li>• Won't evacuate or follow instructions.</li> <li>• Freezing or panicking inappropriately.</li> <li>• Misinterpreting uniforms or alarms.</li> </ul>
Poor hygiene and self-care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor hygiene or dishevelled clothing.</li> <li>• Visible signs of neglect (malnutrition, untreated injuries).</li> </ul>
Home environment red flags	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spoiled food, dirty dishes or excess rubbish.</li> <li>• Misused appliances (e.g. stove left on).</li> <li>• Items in odd places.</li> <li>• Prompting notes ("Eat breakfast", "Your daughter is Sarah").</li> </ul>

## Consideration: what are they experiencing?

*Same emergency, different approach.*

Their experience	How to help
Doesn't understand what's happening	Explain slowly and calmly, even if it seems obvious.
Feeling overwhelmed	Reduce stimulation, give space, use a calm voice.
Sensory overload	Turn off sirens/lights where safe; remove helmets/sunglasses.
Can't follow instructions	Use simple steps, pause between them, point or demonstrate.
Doesn't remember the emergency	Be patient, don't ask to recall details.
Believes they're being arrested	Approach gently, explain your role clearly, avoid sudden moves.

## Engagement: communicate with care

*Lead with calm. Gain trust.*

How to connect	What it looks like
Make a good first impression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Approach gently from the front and explain what you're doing.</li><li>• Learn their name and use it often.</li><li>• Introduce yourself and explain why you're there. Repeat if needed.</li><li>• Keep a calm, reassuring expression.</li><li>• Maintain soft eye contact and smile when appropriate.</li></ul>
Speak clearly and simply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speak slowly and clearly.</li><li>• Use short, simple sentences.</li><li>• Be patient and wait for a response.</li><li>• Repeat or rephrase gently if needed.</li><li>• Provide reassurance often.</li></ul>
Respect personal space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid crowding and keep a calm, non-threatening posture.</li><li>• Position yourself at eye level. Don't stand over the person.</li><li>• Ask permission before touching them.</li><li>• Don't argue or correct – gently redirect.</li><li>• Validate the person's feelings, even if their facts are incorrect.</li></ul>