

# Visiting someone living in a care home

This help sheet describes the importance of maintaining social connections for the person living with dementia, and tips for family and friends to make the most of their visits.

Engaging and maintaining connections with family and friends is important to the person living with dementia.

Visiting in person is often the main way you will connect. When visiting isn't possible, there are other ways to stay in contact.

Ideas for visiting:

- Encourage family members to visit, as well as friends the person has made throughout their life.
- Consider arranging video calls if visiting in person is not possible.
- Encourage children (such as grandchildren) to visit. If the children are young, prepare treats to keep them entertained.
- If the residential care home allows it, take in a pet.

## Activities

Ask if there are organised activities at the care home that the person living with dementia and their visitors can participate in. Arrange your own activities that focus on the person's interests and capabilities.

What to try:

- look through newspapers and magazines together
- play games that have been enjoyed in the past, or new games that make interacting easy and positive
- play games designed for residents living with dementia and their visitors
- listen to favourite music
- arts and crafts projects you can work on together

- read a favourite book together or listen to an audiobook
- watch a much-loved video
- look through photo albums together
- decorate the person's room with familiar items
- help with personal grooming, such as washing or brushing hair, or giving a hand massage
- walk around the facility's garden
- socialise with other residents.

## Outings

You could organise an outing, such as a short drive to a familiar place, perhaps stopping for afternoon tea or meeting with friends.

## Visiting in the later stages of dementia

Visits can be as often as you want and as long as feels right. What is important is to be 'in the moment', which will help make each visit as rewarding as possible.

Try an activity that draws on the senses (sight, taste, smell, hearing and touch). This can be enjoyable, reassuring or stimulating.

What to try:

- a gentle kiss or holding hands
- massaging legs, hands and feet with scented creams or oils
- enjoying the scent of perfumes or flowers
- a smile, or looking at the person affectionately
- playing familiar music
- visits from friends and relatives, even if the visitors are not recognised
- reciting a poem or reading from a favourite book
- going around the grounds.

## Leaving after a visit

Leaving after a visit can be a challenging time for you and the person you are visiting.

### What to try:

- Take something to do during the visit. Once this has been finished, it is time to go.
- Leave when a meal is about to be served, so the person has something else to do.
- Ask the staff to do an activity with the person when you leave.
- Let the person know (sometimes regularly) how long you can stay and why you need to leave. You might say: “I can stay for an hour, but then I have to go shopping.”
- Keep farewells brief and leave straight away. Apologising or staying a little longer can make future farewells even harder.

## Feeling homesick

It is common for people with dementia who are living in a care home to say that they want to go home. This can be upsetting for families and carers.

### What to try:

- Try to understand and acknowledge the feelings behind wanting to go home.
- Don't disagree or try to reason with them about wanting to go home.
- Reassure the person that they are safe. Touching and holding them can be reassuring.
- Redirect the person's attention to another topic or activity.
- Reminisce by looking at photographs, or by talking about childhood and family.

## Support for families

Dementia Australia offers advice, counselling and support services to families and carers adjusting to changes in roles and living arrangements. Seeking support can be reassuring, comforting and of practical assistance.

## Additional reading and resources

- A Better Visit app  
A free Dementia Australia app featuring a range of two-player games to support better communication and social interaction between people living with dementia and their visitors.  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/abettervisit](https://dementia.org.au/abettervisit)
- Dementia Australia library service  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/library](https://dementia.org.au/library)
- Dementia Australia support  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/support](https://dementia.org.au/support)
- Dementia Australia education  
Visit: [dementia.org.au/education](https://dementia.org.au/education)

### Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

**National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500**

**For language assistance: 131 450**

**Visit our website: [dementia.org.au](https://dementia.org.au)**