

Tips for visiting

“Regular visits can make a difference to you and your relative or friend’s emotional well-being.” Marion, residential carer

Tips for families, friends and carers

Visiting family and friends with dementia is important for their emotional wellbeing. However people with dementia are usually not able to initiate activities or ‘entertain’ you, the visitor. Here are a few tips you may find useful when visiting your friend or family member, whether they live at home or in residential care.

1. Develop a flexible attitude

We all have high and low energy days and your friend or family member may be tired the day you visit. While things may not go as you had planned, remember your visit is still important – for you and the person you are visiting.

2. Be kind to yourself

Visiting can sometimes be sad and difficult, and you may need nurturing – perhaps take a supportive friend with you or plan a treat for yourself on the way home.

3. Take something with you

You can engage the person you’re visiting by taking a magazine or newspaper with you. Read out interesting articles or do a quiz together. Take flowers, a food treat or old photos or postcards. This then becomes an activity which helps with stimulation and reminiscence.

4. Establish a visiting ritual

Say and do the same things on arrival and departure at each visit. This will add structure for your relative or friend. Introduce yourself on arrival. For example say “Hello Mum, it’s me, Elizabeth, your daughter”. This reduces your friend or family member’s anxiety as you remind them of your name and connection to them – don’t make them guess.

5. Write cards and letters

Working together, write a letter to your mutual friends or family. This can nourish and maintain important links in their life.

6. Get to know the care staff by name

If visiting a residential care facility, introduce yourself and explain your relationship to the person you are visiting.

7. Silence is not a negative thing

Instead, try to learn to enjoy quiet times.

8. Organise a drink

A cup of coffee, tea or glass of water will help your friend or family member’s fluid intake, socialisation and continue normal ‘old’ patterns of hospitality.

9. Talking isn’t everything

Hugs, hand and neck massages and hand holding can replace or complement conversation.

10. Start a ‘communication book’ of important things to remember

This can be written in and read by all visitors and act as a memory prompt for your friend or relative.

11. Make a life book

This is a wonderful way of validating the life journey of your friend or family member and remembering accomplishments. Work through it on your visits. This project can make your time together even more enjoyable and special.

12. Consider doing tasks

Sew labels on clothing, assist with food and fluids or take the person you are visiting for a walk. This will not only benefit your friend or relative but it will also maintain your vital role and help you to feel useful and important. It can also assist care staff in residential facilities.

13. Play an instrument or sing

If you are musical, consider playing an instrument or singing for your friend or relative. Music creates relaxation, a return to fond memories and feelings of calm and security.

14. Take an animal or your pet with you

A visit from a well-loved pet can improve the emotional health and well-being of your friend or relative. If visiting a residential care facility, speak to staff before taking your pet with you.

15. Know that your visit makes a difference

Research suggests that people living in residential care need emotional support for their well-being and are less likely to be depressed when they have regular weekly visitors.

16. If necessary, talk to someone

There are many issues around changing roles and grief that affect families, friends and carers of people with dementia. It is very important to take care of yourself. Speak to a supportive friend about your feelings or call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

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**



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