

Help for families of a person living with dementia during a pandemic



During challenging times, we acknowledge how difficult it is for the families of someone living with dementia within a residential aged care or hospital setting to stay connected.

It is important that you feel supported in your caring role. The following information will assist you in staying connected and provide strategies for continuing to support your family member in the best way possible.

What is happening for your family member right now?

- They are continuing to receive the ongoing personal care they need.
- Medical treatment for acute and chronic conditions is continuing as required.
- Constant monitoring is ensuring that any changes to health status are acted upon immediately.

What you and do:

- Adhere to government guidelines or restrictions put in place by individual care homes. These have been carefully considered and ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone.
- Protect yourself from unnecessary risk of exposure. This will inhibit your ability to stay connected.
- Don't visit anyone outside of your own home if you are feeling unwell or have cold or flu like symptoms.
- Avoid conversations with your family member that may leave them feeling stressed or heighten anxiety levels. They may not understand what is going on.



What your family member needs you to do:

- If you are permitted to visit, think about how you are feeling. If you are feeling uptight, stressed or under pressure, give yourself permission to have the day off.
- Avoid conversations within earshot of your family member or other residents about what is happening globally. If you need to talk, try a friend, family member or speak to a staff member privately.
- Be realistic about what you can provide and achieve during this time.
- Look after yourself by developing your own self-care plan. Include, eating well, resting when needed and gentle exercise.
- Treat yourself. It might be as simple as a cup of tea in the garden, catching up with a phone call or online chat, or reading a book.
- Seek medical attention if you are unwell or to manage ongoing conditions.
- When leaving a visit, avoid big farewells or goodbyes. These may lead to increase stress levels. Maybe consider saying something like "I need to pop up to shops before they shut, is there anything I can get you?" OR "It's getting late and I feel tired. I need to go to bed now".

“During times of uncertainty, it is important that you feel supported in your caring role.”



What you can do to stay connected



Leave a note or card to say how lovely it was to catch up or that you are looking forward to catching up soon for a cup of tea and cake.



Write a letter or a card using large print. Involve family and get others to contribute. They can email letters to you that you can print and send or deliver together. Drawings by children will often bring a smile. Everyone enjoys receiving a letter or card especially if they are feeling isolated.



If possible, prepare and drop off a care package wrapped as a present that the person will enjoy opening. This may include a new pair of slippers, a book, magazine and favourite treats or snacks if permitted. Please check with the home or hospital regarding their policy for pre-cleaning packages for safety.



Establish regular contact using electronic devices for video or phone calls. Let the person know when you will connect with them next (even if they are unlikely to remember). It doesn't have to be at a set time. You may prepare an easy to read schedule for calls that they or staff can refer to.

More tips on staying connected overleaf

“ Everyone enjoys receiving a letter or card especially if they are feeling isolated. ”



What you can do to stay connected (continued):



Read a story or favourite poem in person or record yourself doing this on a device. You can sing a song with the person and record that too. Staff will find this valuable to use later on if the person becomes unsettled or simply enjoys hearing your voice, stories or music. Audio books could also be used along with a preloaded music collection.



Create memory boxes with special items or put together photo albums or reminiscence boards. Not only does it assist someone to remember times gone by but provides staff with ways to connect and create personalised conversation if you are unable to be there.

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Please be mindful that staff will be overwhelmed with calls from families and implementing extra measures to ensure everyone stays safe. Everyone is doing the best they can during an extremely difficult time, so please be kind and patient with staff and to yourself and we will get through this together.



DSA continues to support your care home, via our normal referral pathways. **We are considered a 'professional service' for residential care by the Commonwealth Department of Health** and, as such, our Dementia Consultants remain able to visit to provide direct support, or phone or video conference depending on your preference. Regardless of whether your home is in lockdown or not, we are still available to support.

 1800 699 799

 dementia.com.au

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