

# *Volunteer Handbook*

## *Dementia Care*



### Understanding Dementia

Dementia is very common in long term care residents. Volunteers are often asked to work with residents who are affected by dementia, because they are in need of much more individual support and attention. It is important that our volunteers understand about dementia and develop good communication skills. As your skill and confidence builds, rich reward may be found from sharing yourself with someone in need.

This handbook aims to give you, the volunteer, basic understanding of dementia, common behaviors that may be seen, how to communicate, and ideas of successful visiting with the resident who has dementia.

*What is dementia?*

The word generally means “brain failure”. Dementia is defined as the loss of mental processing ability, including communication, abstract thinking, judgement and physical abilities, such that it interferes with daily living.

Symptoms include:

- short-term memory loss
- long-term memory loss
- lowered motivation
- forgetting to turn off ovens, lock doors, and other "automatic" responses
- personality changes
- mood changes
- difficulties with money and math
- disorientation
- becoming lost or disoriented in familiar surroundings.

### ***What causes dementia?***

The main risk factor for late-onset dementia is ageing. There are more than 100 types of dementia. The most common cause is Alzheimer's disease, accounting for nearly two-thirds of cases. If you have Alzheimer's disease, changes develop in your brain's structure. These lead to the death of nerve cells and disrupt your brain's usual activity. There is also less of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. This is needed for communicating messages related to memory - having less of it affects your ability to remember things.

Your risk of dementia may be affected if someone else in your family has it. However, more research is needed to better understand this link.

### ***Where do seniors with dementia live?***

A recent Canadian survey showed that approximately 50% of seniors with dementia live in the community, while the other half live in long term care facilities. Approximately 70% of the residents of our long term care facilities have some degree of dementia.

### ***What are common symptoms of dementia?***

You may have some or all of the following symptoms.

- You will have memory loss, particularly of recent events. This may not be severe at first but is likely to become progressively worse. Later, your long-term memory may be affected.
- You may have problems finding the right words for what you want to say.
- It's possible that you will have trouble thinking clearly and doing practical tasks that you used to do easily.

- You may feel puzzled and disorientated in new places. As dementia progresses, you may have difficulty finding your way around in familiar places, such as your own home.
- The feeling of disorientation may increase so you don't know what month or year it is, or the time of day. This could cause you to get up in the middle of the night wanting to go out.
- Family and friends may notice changes in your personality and behaviour. You may become withdrawn, prone to fits of temper, or anxious and depressed.
- As your dementia worsens, you may no longer be able to look after yourself. It's possible that eventually you won't recognise close relatives and friends.

Dementia is progressive and in time your symptoms will get more severe. It affects everyone differently - this is determined by factors such as your personality and the support available to you.

It's difficult to say how long you will live once you are diagnosed with dementia - the type you have influences this. The average life expectancy for people with Alzheimer's disease is six years.

### ***What behaviors might you encounter when visiting someone with dementia?***

Changes caused by dementia can lead to a person exhibiting small or significant differences in their behaviour. Each individual's dementia has features that are unique to them. However, there are commonly recognised behaviours that develop which are out of character, and can, in some instances, become extreme.

Here are some examples of what can happen when you suffer from dementia:

- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Hypochondria
- Searching
- Calling out
- Withdrawing
- Aggression
- Constant talking
- Hallucinating
- Restlessness
- Feeling low
- Swearing
- Inappropriate dressing
- Mood changes

- Odd gestures
- Poor sleep pattern
- Wandering
- Constant suspicion
- Acting out of character
- Inappropriate urination
- Repetitive behaviour or questions

### ***10 tips to help cope with the behaviors of someone with dementia:***

Caring for someone with dementia can be a rewarding but frustrating process. If that person exhibits unusual behaviour (e.g. aggression) it can make the caring process a lonely and frightening one. Here are ten tips/ideas that may help:

1. Don't blame yourself and don't blame the person with dementia. You are doing your best.
2. Share what's going on. Be open with those around you. Understanding may follow.
3. Look for meaning behind odd/unusual behaviour.
4. Are you staying well? Who looks after you?
5. Avoid unrealistic goals and activities – just what can they do now?
6. What helps you to stay calm? Can you find away or is it time to find help?
7. Have you tried diversion? Does reassurance work?
8. The person with dementia has changed; perhaps you have to change with them.
9. Make the most of the good times.
10. Seek advice and accept help. There is no shame in asking.

### ***Communication tips for someone with dementia:***

It's not what you say, but how you say it. This expression holds doubly true when communicating with individuals with dementia.

Alzheimer's disease or related illnesses impair a person's ability to understand words and to speak. However, they can still benefit from non-verbal communication - body language, voice tone and facial expressions. As the individual's ability to process verbal information declines, the importance of how caregivers communicate with them, verbally and non-verbally, increases.

### **Here are some tips to enhance interactions:**

- Remember that the individual with dementia might be feeling confused, anxious, irritable and depressed, and suffering from low self-esteem.
- Rely on the four S's: Simple, Slow, Show, and Smile.

- **Simple** - Use simple words and simple sentences. And give instructions one step at a time. Too much information can be overwhelming for a person with dementia.
- **Slow** - Speak slowly, and allow enough time for the person to understand each thought or question.
- **Show** - the person with dementia what you are saying; don't just say it. Use body language, facial expressions and gestures to tell your story so the person can benefit from your words and your actions. For example, point to objects or demonstrate an action, such as brushing your teeth.
- **Smile** - A smile sends a powerful message of reassurance. Be conscious of your facial expressions. Using facial expressions to show that you are friendly will help the person with dementia better understand the tone of the discussion.
- Speak in a tone that is calm and reassuring.
- Make certain that the person with dementia has the best chance of seeing and hearing you. This involves checking that the person is wearing glasses and hearing aids, if necessary, and that talking occurs in a quiet environment.
- Approach the individual from the front. It may startle and upset him if you touch him unexpectedly or draw near from behind.
- Before asking the individual to do something, address him by name to get his attention. While you are speaking, maintain eye contact to help him focus.
- Ask only one question at a time and allow time for an answer. If he does not seem to understand, repeat the question using the same wording. If this does not work, after a few minutes, rephrase it.
- Allow the individual adequate time to respond in conversation or when performing an activity. Rushing will increase confusion.
- If the individual repeatedly asks a question, keep in mind that he cannot remember the response you have just given him. Instead of answering the question after a second or third repetition, reassure the individual in some way-everything is fine, you will be with him/her, you will help him/her.
- Eliminate distractions, such as the TV or radio, when talking to the person with dementia.
- Avoid statements that sound negative. For example, instead of ""Don't go outside,"" say, ""Stay inside.""
- Use humour whenever possible, though not at the individual's expense.
- Break down all tasks into simple steps. Tell the individual one step at a time what to do. Giving too many directions at once or too quickly will increase confusion. If the individual gets upset and becomes uncooperative, stop and try again later.

- Keep on talking, even when a person may no longer be verbal. Chat about things that mattered to the person and mention names of family and friends. Even if communication is one-sided, it can loudly show that you care.

Suggestions for visiting a residents with dementia:

- Reminisce – Many residents enjoy reminiscing. Skillful listening is important. As the story unfolds, you can comment on their feelings, the content of their stories, ask simple questions and express an interest. It is helpful to read residents life history boards (on the outside wall of their room) prior to meeting a resident for the first time. These boards will enable you to discover commonalities and pick conversation topics that are both meaningful and important. Reminiscing is a stimulating and rewarding activity that is appropriate for residents of all levels of dementia.
- Walking – Elderly people living in facilities often spend many hours indoors. A fresh breath of fresh air, a chat around a garden table or a wander through our lovely gardens is often a refreshing and positive change in scenery. Please ensure that the resident is warm enough and has safe footwear on. Comment on the weather and all the beautiful surroundings.
- Music – Music is the universal language. It is endless the comfort and pleasure this can bring to our seniors. Humming a tune, singing or listening to some music on the stereo can all bring enjoyment and relaxation. This is ideal for residents who can no longer carry conversation.
- Grooming activities – Nursing staff take care of the essentials as bathing and haircare, but many grooming extras are difficult to provide. A manicure, hand massage, brushing hair and putting on make-up are all a way of communication and give the resident a sense of well-being.
- Household tasks – Sorting socks, folding towels and bibs, rolling balls of wool etc. are all skills that were learnt and practised through life. Doing such thing can be life affirming and rewarding to our seniors.

**If you have any questions our Recreation Co-ordinator would be happy to help answer them.**

## THE TREASURES IN YOU

There are treasures in life,  
but owners are few  
Of money and power  
to buy things brand new.

Yet you can be wealthy  
and feel regal too,  
If you will just look  
for the treasures in you.

These treasures in life  
are not hard to find  
When you look in your heart,  
your soul, and your mind.

For when you are willing  
to share what's within,  
Your fervent search  
for riches will end.

The joy and the laughter,  
the smile that you bring;  
The heart unafraid  
to love and to sing;

The hand always willing  
to help those in need;  
Ones quick to reach out,  
to labor and fee.

So thank you for sharing  
these great gifts inside;  
The caring, the cheering,  
the hug when one cried.

Thanks for the energy,  
encouragement too,  
And thank you for sharing

the treasures in you.