

How to talk to a loved one about dementia

Have you noticed changes in a loved one or friend and are worried it might be dementia? Often, the first step to helping someone is to talk to them about your concerns, however this can be a difficult and awkward conversation to have.

Start by letting the person know you want to make sure they are ok. Try not to sound critical of their behaviour or actions. The person may be unaware that anything is wrong, feel embarrassed, or become angry or defensive. They may also be relieved you have noticed changes. Be prepared for different reactions. Above all, try to imagine how you would feel if it were you.

Here are some more tips to help you have the conversation:

Choose the time and place

Minimise the number of people involved in the conversation. Choose a time when neither person is busy, tired or distracted. The morning is usually best. Use a place that is comfortable, familiar, quiet and free of background noise and distractions.

Talk with compassion

Use a gentle tone of voice. A person experiencing these changes may not realise anything is wrong. Changes in the brain can interfere with a person's ability to have insight into memory lapses, or changes in their behaviour.

Talk about the symptoms not a diagnosis

Explain that you are concerned about the person's memory, or that they haven't been themselves lately. Give a couple of examples. Remember, it may not be dementia. There are many conditions that can cause symptoms, such as memory loss, commonly associated with dementia.

Be patient

Allow your loved one time to come to terms with the idea something might not be right with them. It may take a few conversations for them to acknowledge what you are saying.

Encourage them to see a doctor

Reassure the person you will go with them to the appointment so you can support each other and understand the next steps. If the person resists seeing a doctor about symptoms, suggest an appointment for another reason such as a blood pressure check or review of medication. If the person doesn't believe there is anything wrong, it may be worthwhile contacting the doctor in advance, either in person or by email. Make notes of your concerns or changes you have noticed and bring these to the appointment.

For information about dementia or just to talk, call Alzheimer's WA on **1300 66 77 88** or visit alzheimerswa.org.au.