

# COPING WITH PLACEMENT

This Help Sheet provides suggestions for families and carers for dealing with their changing role once the person with dementia has moved to a residential facility. It includes practical suggestions for continuing a caring relationship and ways to manage any problems that may arise when visiting.

## Continuing to care

When a person with dementia moves into residential care the role of families and carers does not usually come to an end. Many people may choose to stay involved with practical caring tasks such as assisting at mealtimes. Others become involved in the social activities of the facility. However the level of involvement will vary with each individual.

## Visiting

Visiting is usually very important to both the resident and their family and carers. It is often the main way that families and carers stay connected with people they have cared for, even though they may no longer provide the day-to-day caregiving.

The person with dementia may enjoy seeing other members of the family or old friends. Encourage grandchildren to visit. If the children are young prepare a visiting bag that contains treats to keep them entertained. If the facility allows bring in a pet.

Visiting can sometimes be difficult, especially as the abilities of the person with dementia decline. Try to find some ways to make visiting as pleasurable as possible.

### What to try

- Bring newspapers and magazines to look at together
- Reading mail together
- Play games that have been enjoyed in the past
- Listen to a tape of music, or a story
- Watch a well loved video
- Look at photo albums together
- Help decorate and tidy the room
- Help with personal grooming – washing or brushing hair, painting nails
- Assist with writing to friends and relatives

## Outings

The person with dementia might enjoy an outing.

### What to try

- A short drive in the car, perhaps stopping for afternoon tea
- A visit to another person in the facility
- A stroll or wheel around the facility garden

## Visiting in the later stages

Find an activity that will draw in as many of the senses as possible – sight, taste, smell, hearing and touch.

### What to try

- A gentle kiss or hand holding may be reassuring
- Massaging legs, hands and feet with scented creams or oils may be enjoyable for some people. The scent of perfumes and flowers may also be enjoyed
- A smile, a comforting gaze or a look of affection may often provide reassurance
- Music may provide comfort and familiarity
- Visits from friends and relatives, even though they may not be recognised or remembered, can still provide stimulation and comfort
- Listening to a favourite book or poem being read may be enjoyable
- A stroll around the grounds, even if in a wheelchair, may be enjoyable for both the resident and visitor

There is no right number of times to visit or amount of time to stay. The important thing is to make each visit as rewarding as possible.

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## Parting

Leaving after a visit can be a very difficult time for both the person with dementia and their visitors.

### What to try

- Take something to do. Once you have finished this it is time to go
- Ask the staff to divert the resident or leave when a meal is about to be served so that there will be something else to do
- Let the person know at the beginning of the visit how long you can stay and why you have to leave. For instance "I can stay for an hour but then I have to go shopping"
- Keep farewells brief and leave straight away. Lingering, apologising or staying a little longer can make future farewells even harder

## Wanting to go home

A common phrase heard from people with dementia in residential facilities is "I want to go home". This can be especially upsetting for family and carers.

Wanting to go home may be caused by feelings of insecurity, depression or fear. It may be that 'home' is a term used to describe memories of a time or place that was comfortable and secure. It may be memories of childhood or of a home or friends who no longer exist.

### What to try

- Try to understand and acknowledge the feelings behind the wish to go home
- Reassure the person that they will be safe. Touching and holding can be reassuring
- Reminisce by looking at photographs or by talking about childhood and family
- Try to redirect them with food or other activities such as a walk
- Don't disagree or try to reason with them about wanting to go home

## Support groups

Alzheimer's Australia coordinates a large number of support groups throughout Australia. Many people find comfort and practical assistance by attending these meetings with others who know what it is like to care for a person with dementia. Families and carers may be looking after a person with dementia at home, or the person may be in a residential facility.

Support groups bring together families, carers and friends of people with dementia under the guidance of a group facilitator. The facilitator is usually a health professional or someone with first hand experience of caring for a person with dementia.

Many facilities run relatives' groups because they acknowledge the difficulties expressed by many families once the move has occurred.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Alzheimer's Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at **fightdementia.org.au**



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