

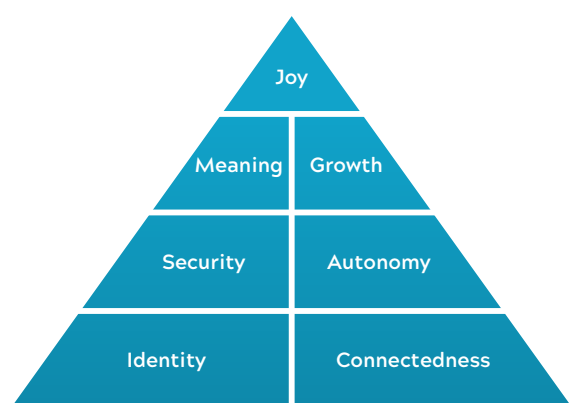
COVID-19: Supporting people living with dementia

Looking after the physical health of yourself and your loved one is paramount during these difficult times. Equally important is being aware of the impact on emotional health for you and a person living with dementia. You may notice the person you care for is acting differently or saying things that are concerning due to feeling a heightened sense of illbeing.

It is important to consider how the news, isolation and concerns are impacting on a person. In considering the possible impact it is useful to consider the Domains of Wellbeing™ model. The model identifies seven key areas of human need that can have a significant impact on wellbeing or illbeing. These are important to us all but can especially impact a person living with dementia.

If you would like to learn more visit:
edenalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/EdenAltWellBeingWhitePaperv5.pdf

Here are some of the key areas that may be impacted:



Connectedness

As people are increasingly being encouraged to self-isolate and groups, clubs and cafes are cancelling events and meetings, you and your loved one may find yourselves feeling increasingly lonely and disconnected from your normal social networks.

As the 70+ age group is considered to be a vulnerable group for COVID-19 social distancing will become increasingly prominent over the next few weeks. Stay connected through activities such as:

- » Video calls using Skype/FaceTime with family and friends
- » Getting the grandkids to write to their grandparents and email photos and video clips
- » Regular phone calls
- » Online community chat rooms

Reassuring the person living with dementia that things will soon return to normal and they will once again be connected to people and groups that matter to them can help reduce feelings of anxiety and loneliness.

Security

This is an unsettling time for all of us and will be especially so for many people living with dementia. Their ability to rationalise the situation or filter the negative media may be impaired and an overwhelming sense of insecurity, fear or anxiety may be present.

This illbeing may present itself through unusual behaviour for the person or being very quiet and withdrawn. It is not uncommon for some people living with dementia to mix up news stories with their lives so the person may think it is their family with the virus or who has died.

If this is happening, gently start by reassuring the person, validating their concerns and emotions then moving on to more positive thoughts. If you would like to learn a little more about validation techniques please view this video from last year's Dementia Partnership Project symposium with Vicki De Klerk:
youtube.com/watch?v=BNrq4fkAL68

Autonomy

A sense of independence and self-determination is important for all of us. Opportunities for independence may become diminished during this time for a person living with dementia, as their opportunity to visit the shops, go for a walk or be part of a group is reduced.

When our sense of autonomy is diminished we can sometimes get frustrated and angry as we feel we are being treated like a child. Finding every opportunity for your loved one to make decisions is a great way to help combat this feeling, even if it is something you know they would like or choose normally. Go out of your way to ask them and let them decide. It can feel a bit silly sometimes when you know the person so well but every time you ask rather than assume you are helping them feel in control.

Meaning

With people spending more time at home, a person living with dementia may feel higher levels of boredom than normal. Finding activities the person enjoys doing can be very helpful, and support you to keep the person engaged and reduce their anxiety.

Putting together an activity area or box in the home with things the person can access and engage with, that brings them some joy and meaning, is a great way to stimulate and divert the person's anxiety. Exercise is good for us all so consider some seated exercises, or dig out those old Jane Fonda workout videos! One great activity is to find out a list of favourite holidays then jump online and share a journey visiting websites of that area, looking at photos and talking about why the holiday was so good for them.

This can lead to digging out the old photo box which is always a great way to spend a few hours. Please see links below for some online activities you could do with your loved one if you have an iPad or computer at home.

Joy

During these worrying times it can be hard to find joy. We are being bombarded with doom and gloom stories, and you and your loved one may be overwhelmed with the negative feeling around you.

Finding joy at times like this is more important than ever to give our emotions some balance. Understanding what brings your loved one joy and putting some extra focus on these opportunities can be important at times of distress. If not done yet, now could be a great time to put together a meaningful music playlist and share some singing and dancing together. Research has shown music that has meaning to us affects the brain and makes us feel better.

Life stories can often bring people joy and reminiscing has been proven to cause positive chemical releases in the brain. It is an activity the whole family can get involved in. Our website has tips on creating a life story book.

Carer Stress

Of course this situation is not just affecting the person with dementia. You, the carer, may also be struggling with isolation, anxiety and concerns for your loved one if either of you get sick. You may be at home with your loved one more than usual and if their illbeing is high they may be causing you more difficulties than normal in supporting them.

It may be that increased in home services, or a different type of service to normal (for example shopping, walking the dog or in home respite) could be very helpful for a short period. You may be reluctant to have services due to concerns of the virus spreading but be reassured that aged care services have strict protocols and infection control processes in place to minimise the risk.

Consider having a few hours of in home respite regularly to give yourself a break and have some "me time". Support workers can provide meaningful engagement for your loved one while you get out in the garden, have a rest or just switch off for a couple of hours. Keeping yourself healthy and managing your stress and anxiety is critical for you and your loved one.

To discuss services or any concerns please do not hesitate to contact your service coordinator or our office on 1300 66 77 88.

Online activity ideas -

Virtual Tours

- » artsandculture.google.com/theme/11-dramatic-virtual-tours-of-stages-around-the-world/1gJiszMqItReJA
- » artsandculture.google.com/
- » artsandculture.google.com/project/streetviews
- » britishmuseum.withgoogle.com/
- » artsandculture.google.com/partner/musee-dorsay-paris?hl=en
- » artsandculture.google.com/entity/pergamon/m05tcm?hl=en
- » artsandculture.google.com/partner/uffizi-gallery?hl=en
- » portrait.gov.au/calendar/live-video-tour-npg?
- » mentalfloss.com/article/60704/15-amazing-places-you-can-tour-virtually
- » google.com/earth/

Exercise

- » [Ballet4You](https://www.ballet4you.com/)
- » youtube.com/watch?v=8BcPHWGQO44

Building a Music Playlist

- » musicandmemory.org/get-involved/for-elder-caregivers/
- » musicfordementia2020.com/2019/12/04/create-a-playlist-listen-to-recorded-music/
- » playlistforlife.org.uk

Fun things

- » playback.fm/birthday-song
- » playback.fm/birthday-movie
- » rainymood.com/
- » dementiauk.org/for-professionals/free-resources/life-story-work/
- » interiorhealth.ca/YourCare/ChronicConditionDisease/Dementia/Documents/GuideLifeStoryTools.pdf

alzheimer'swa
the dementia experts

For support on your dementia journey, information about dementia and how to access services to support you and your loved ones please contact our customer support team on:

1300 66 77 88 or **support@alzheimerswa.org.au**

or visit **alzheimerswa.org.au**

