

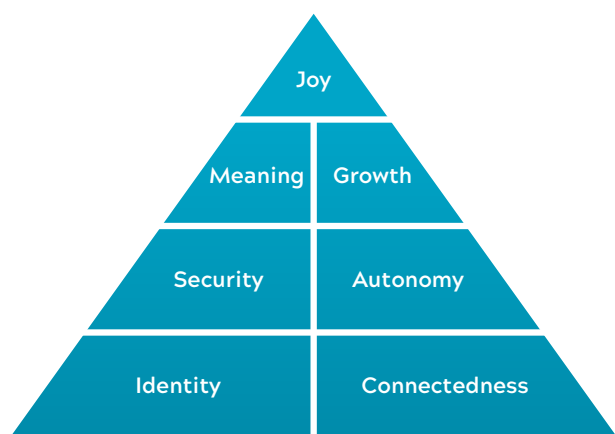
# COVID-19: Supporting people living with dementia

### Practice Considerations

Aside from the physical health implications if a person living with dementia catches COVID-19 it is worth considering the impact that media, social media and the public response is having on people living with dementia and their families. When you visit a person at home, you may notice some changes.

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 about the domains please visit here: [edenalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/EdenAltWellBeingWhitePaperV5.pdf](https://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, your client and their carer may find themselves

feeling increasingly lonely and disconnected from their normal social networks.

As the 70+ age group is considered to be a vulnerable group for COVID-19 social isolation will become increasingly prominent over the next few weeks and months.

Helping families connect through Skype/FaceTime, getting the grandkids to write to their grandparents, encouraging regular voice or video connection with family and friends can all help with a sense of isolation. During your visit you might decide to spend a little more time talking with the person about their family and social networks to remind them and reassure them that things will soon return to normal and they will once again be connected to people and groups that matter to them.

### 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 behavior 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, finding out the facts from the carer and then 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](https://youtube.com/watch?v=BNrq4fkAL68)

## Autonomy

A sense of independence and self-determination is important for all of us. Your client's opportunities for independence may be diminished during this time 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 client 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 get them to 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, your client may feel higher levels of boredom than normal. Finding activities the person enjoys doing when you are not there can be very helpful, and support the carer to keep the person engaged and reduce their anxiety.

Work with the carer to put 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.

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 the person if they have an iPad or computer at their home.

## Joy

During these worrying times it can be hard to find joy. We are being bombarded with doom and gloom stories and your clients may be overwhelmed with the negativity they are feeling around them.

Finding joy at times like this is more important than ever to give our emotions some balance. Hopefully you have a good idea of what brings your clients joy and can put some extra focus on these opportunities. If not done yet, now could be a great time to put together a meaningful music playlist and share some singing and dancing together.

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. You can start it off and ask them to contribute (this can also become an invaluable resource if the person moves into a care home). Our website has tips on creating a life story book.

## Carer Stress

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

A simple check in with the carer is a great way to start a conversation and let them know it is ok to tell you how they are travelling. Asking if they have any specific concerns or worries can start to tease out any solutions or responses your service may be able to help with. If they need more services, or a different type of service to normal, encourage them to contact your office straight away so they can get extra help.

You may find the carer more reluctant to have their service as they may be concerned about people coming into the home and spreading the virus. It is important to reassure them that there are strong protocols and practices in place to minimise risk and the spread of the virus. Encourage them to talk to their coordinator if they have any concerns about this.

If you are concerned about how a carer may be coping or feel they could benefit from extra help in any way do not hesitate to contact your coordinator or office to have a chat about what you see or feel is happening in the home. These are stressful times, especially for people living with dementia and their carers, and our thoughtfulness, person-centred approach and willingness to be flexible with support services will be critical in helping families through it.

## Online activity ideas

### Virtual Tours

- » [artsandculture.google.com/theme/11-dramatic-virtual-tours-of-stages-around-the-world/1gJiszMqItReJA](https://artsandculture.google.com/theme/11-dramatic-virtual-tours-of-stages-around-the-world/1gJiszMqItReJA)
- » [artsandculture.google.com/](https://artsandculture.google.com/)
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- » [artsandculture.google.com/entity/pergamon/m05tcm?hl=en](https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/pergamon/m05tcm?hl=en)
- » [artsandculture.google.com/partner/uffizi-gallery?hl=en](https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/uffizi-gallery?hl=en)
- » [portrait.gov.au/calendar/live-video-tour-npg?](https://portrait.gov.au/calendar/live-video-tour-npg?)
- » [mentalfloss.com/article/60704/15-amazing-places-you-can-tour-virtually](https://mentalfloss.com/article/60704/15-amazing-places-you-can-tour-virtually)
- » [google.com/earth/](https://google.com/earth/)

## Exercise

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

## Building a Music Playlist

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

## Fun things

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

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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](mailto:support@alzheimerswa.org.au)**  
or visit **[alzheimerswa.org.au](https://alzheimerswa.org.au)**