

Core Needs of People Living with Dementia

The core needs of people living with dementia are the same as everyone else's needs:

- To feel useful
- Give and receive love
- Experience joy and laughter
- Retain a sense of self-worth
- Care for ourselves and others

Interacting with People with Dementia

1. Never argue.
2. The person with dementia is always right.
3. Is there a need to be met?
4. Ask a simple question; keep it short; allow time for a response.
5. Help the person feel in control.
6. Show you care.
7. Don't take things personally.
8. Acknowledge feelings.
9. Put yourself in the person's position.
10. Watch your mood and body language (people with dementia tend to mirror the emotions of those around them). Calm begets calm. Try to remain happy and positive.
11. Logic and reason do not apply.
12. Pay attention to body language and non-verbal messages.
13. Listen to verbal messages, can you build on them?
14. Accept people where they are.

Helpful Responses

1. I do things like that, too.
2. Between the two of us, we will be ok.
3. You're a pretty special person.
4. Wow, you're so smart!
5. Thank you, I couldn't have done it without you.
6. You always look out for me!
7. I will be here if you need anything
8. Don't worry. I'll take care of it.
9. You are pretty important around here.
10. If you need anything, just let me know.
11. That's a good idea. I'll have to try that!

Techniques

Use Validation. Don't argue with a person with a cognitive disorder. Move to that person's reality instead. If a person living with dementia insists it's her birthday, then there is little you can do to change that firmly held, if untrue, belief.

Try Re-direction. People living with dementia can have short attention spans and may be diverted to another subject when they are agitated or angry. The idea with re-direction is to “change the subject”.

Features of a Dementia Friendly Environment

In businesses and public places, some features that are helpful to those of us with dementia include:

- **Signage** that is in bold face type with good color contrast
- **Lighting** for entrances that is bright and uses as much natural light as possible
- **Non-slip flooring** that isn't highly reflective
- **Seating** for waiting or resting
- **Landmarks** for guidance

Resources

Although many excellent resources exist for learning more about dementia and dementia-friendly communities, listed below are some good starting points:

Wisconsin Aging and Disability Resource Centers

<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/index.htm>

Alzheimer's Association

<http://www.alz.org>

or 24/7 Helpline: 1.800.272.3900

Building Dementia-Friendly Communities Toolkit

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01000.pdf>

Wisconsin Dementia Care System Redesign Plan

Dementia Capable Wisconsin

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dementia/index.htm>