



Fact Sheet

Tips on how to interact with people with dementia

- **Dementia is not just about memory loss.** Some people may also lose the ability to identify items, and lose their language skills. For this reason, it is important not to use subtleties in language, as this can be too ambiguous.
- **Acknowledging a person's emotions is important.** You may not always understand what someone is saying. However, you can acknowledge them by actively listening – this validates what someone is experiencing. Think of this as talking to the person's heart rather than their brain. It is not always about logic.
- **Observing behaviour can tell you a lot.** What you see, rather than hear, can be important.
- **Don't go into 'teacher' mode.** We can sometimes speak to someone with dementia in a 'teacherly' way - giving detailed explanations of the 'where' and 'why' of something. This approach can be perceived as patronising. For example, if a person with dementia places their cup near the edge of a table, rather than telling them to move it, or simply moving it yourself, may not be the best approach. Instead, you can pick up the cup to admire it, then casually place it back on the table further in from the edge. This is described as 'supporting someone without them knowing'.
- **People with dementia can experience difficulty with spatial awareness.** Some techniques that may help with this include the use of place mats, which create another 'edge'. A placemat in a favourite colour, which attracts a person, can be a good technique.
- **Avoid asking who people are in photographs.** Instead, comment on how nice the person in the photograph looks.
- **Connect with the person.** It is not about the dementia. Just being with a person is important. Talking can sometimes be overwhelming.
- **People with dementia will often say it as they see it.** This is not to be nasty. A person with dementia does not have an 'inner voice', and can lose their inhibitions. For this reason, a person with dementia may say things that we all may think, but would never normally say.
- **Be aware of issues with brain function and cognition.** These issues can affect the 'sequencing' of people with dementia. For example, a person with dementia may shuffle because their sequencing has been affected.
- **Approach situations from the perspective of the person with dementia.** Try to put yourself in that person's shoes.

For more information, please visit the Alzheimer's Australia website: www.alzheimers.org.au.