

Making a Difference

**Building positive relationships
with residents**



A guide for care staff

WHY USE THIS GUIDE?

The person at the heart of things

As a member of care staff, you're a really important person in your residents' lives. Understanding people and supporting them to get the most out of life is part of what you do, and just as important as meeting their physical needs. This booklet offers practical ideas and examples of how you can make a difference to each person you care for, as you go about your working day / night.

Everyone needs enjoyable relationships and things to do, and this doesn't always have to take a lot of time or organisation. It can mean involving residents in everyday activities, or talking with them when you have a few spare minutes. Little things mean a lot: a smile, a comforting touch, or pleasure in shared moments can really light up someone's day.

This guide can help you to get to know your residents even better by bringing your own life experience, talents and interests into your daily contact with people and making the time you spend together as enjoyable as possible. You are unique, just like the people you care for. We hope you'll find some new ideas, and be inspired to think of further ways you can make a difference.

This way of working can make what is sometimes a difficult job so much more satisfying, and perhaps a little easier.



WHO DO YOU SEE, WHO DO YOU KNOW?

We all need to feel we matter in some way and flourish best when we feel connected to others.

Evie is 80 and lives in a care home. She says:

"I want people to see me as a real person. I was young once, you know! I've lived a full life and I've still got thoughts and feelings to share. Let me know you value me for the person I am."

- **Find out the name I prefer** – use that whenever you speak to me.
- **Position yourself at my eye level** – kneel down if necessary and make eye contact.
- **Be open and positive**, and face me directly, whether kneeling, standing or sitting. Try not to close your body off from me by folding your arms.
- **Gentle touch**, like your hand on mine, is such a comfort and helps me to feel you care about me. I'll let you know if it's not what I want.
- **Speak directly to me**, even if I'm not able to answer. A warm and gentle tone of voice is reassuring.
- **Ask me one thing at a time**, give me time to respond, and listen carefully to the answer. Don't be afraid to say "I don't understand."
- **Value the things I have to say** and show this through a smile, a nod or carrying on a conversation.

Tip: If a person has dementia, uses a wheelchair or has a visual / hearing impairment, try seeing the world from their point of view. What would be important to you if you were in their shoes?

- **Use open questions** — those that start with **what, why, where, how** and **who** to find out about a person; e.g. Where did you used to work? How do you like to spend your time? What was your school like?

Evie says:

“The more you can understand me, the more we’ll get from our time together. Be prepared for me to surprise you! I might be old now, but did you know I travelled to South America and rode a motorbike when I was in my twenties?”

- **Share a fact about yourself** and then lead into a question e.g. “I’m so looking forward to my holiday. Where have your favourite holidays been?” Your interests, life experiences, family and pets are all great conversation starters, as are your likes and dislikes.



If a person living with dementia seems to have difficulty answering questions, **find other ways to prompt conversation**. You could look through a newspaper or magazine and chat about what you see: “Look at this lovely photo, it reminds me of...” or “It makes me feel ...”, then allow plenty of time for the person to respond. Or, if a person struggles to communicate through words, try going through photos and ask them to point to the ones they like the most. This may give you clues to their interests or mood.

- **Direct questions may feel threatening for somebody living with dementia, so try using prompts**, e.g. "That's a beautiful photo on your wall" may be enough to prompt a response. If not, **try describing what you see**: "You look really happy - it looks like you were on holiday". "I wonder..." can also be a good way of eliciting information e.g. "I wonder where you were..."

- **What do you know about the person's religious beliefs or cultural background?**

If one of you grew up in another country, **could you share some of your experiences** and even bring in photos or use an iPad to look at the scenery?  See Resources p.12

- **Find out about popular activities and pastimes** from different decades - what was all the rage when the person was in their 20s?

Tip: If somebody can't tell you about themselves, could you find out more from a relative or a colleague? Family members can help you to discover older people's life stories, helping you to find new ways to connect with them.

Tip: Try learning one new thing about a resident and telling them one new thing about yourself every week.



HAVE YOU GOT A MINUTE?

Here are some ideas for ways to connect with people during everyday tasks, or whenever you've got a few spare minutes.

Even if you're just passing through, a wave, a smile, few words, a shared joke, little things can mean a lot.

Evie says:

"I need to feel I'm still connected to other people and the world around me. I'd like to feel I can still contribute and be useful."



INVOLVE RESIDENTS IN EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES

- **Rather than thinking**

'What do I need to do next?', try thinking 'How can I do this task with this person?'.

Look out for opportunities for people to feel involved, through actions such as watering plants, sorting letters, unpacking a delivery, drawing the curtains, dusting a room, or laying a table.

"I have found dancing works really well with one particular gentleman. We dance together now in the mornings after his shower."

- **Try to incorporate a simple activity into a task** e.g. bring singing or gentle exercise into washing or dressing.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- **Try asking: “How can we make today good for you?”**

- **Use whatever’s in hand to start conversations** e.g. personal photos, ornaments or objects, or someone humming a tune.

- **Have a 'Prop of the day'** - an item you take round with you as a point of interest and interaction (e.g. a hat or a postcard).

BE YOURSELF

- **If you’re enjoying yourself, your residents are more likely to enjoy themselves too** so just being yourself is really important.

Tip: Take a 2 minute refresher if you’re feeling stressed or tired. Sit or stand somewhere undisturbed, feel the ground beneath your feet and take a few gentle, slow breaths. Give your shoulders a roll to release tension. Close your eyes and picture a place of calm. Breathe. Finish with a little shake out to renew your energy.

- **Find a 'Talking point of the day'.**

This could be a seasonal theme (e.g. Valentines, summer holidays, firework night etc), a positive story in the news, or something amusing or interesting that’s happened to you.

Tip: Make the most of opportunities to chat or spend time with people. Just sitting for a few minutes and taking someone’s arm or hand can make all the difference to a person’s mood.

- **Use your own talents and passions:** do you enjoy gardening, cooking, making things, photography, singing, or playing an instrument? Could you share and adapt this to engage some of your residents?
It doesn’t have to be complicated – encourage a sing-along, ask people to help with stirring a cake mixture, or see if they’d like to plant seeds in a pot, for instance.

THE DIFFERENCE YOU CAN MAKE: PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

If someone has dementia, changes in their perceptions and abilities may affect their mood, emotions and ability to communicate. **The more you understand the person**, the better you will be at knowing how they're feeling and identifying what you can do to support them. Always remember you're with a unique person with their own history, feelings and preferences (even if it's not obvious what they are).

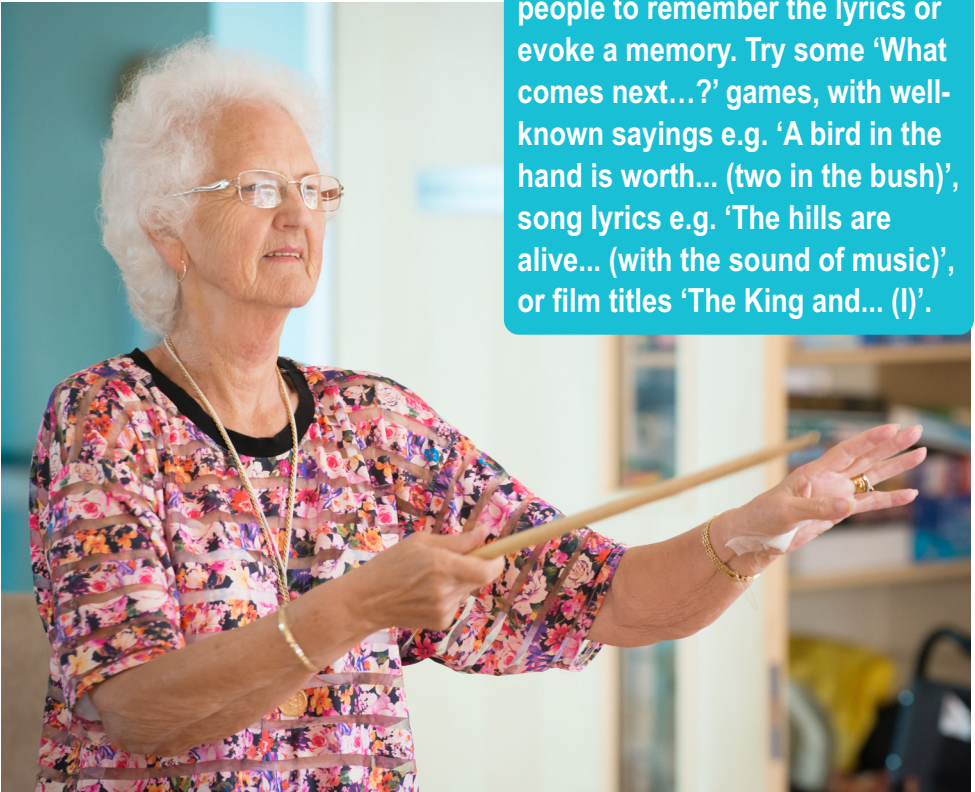
Tom is living with dementia.
Here's what he might say to you if he could:

"Listen to me, even if I can't use words to make you understand. What clues can you pick up about how I'm feeling from my body language, expression or tone of voice?"



- **Always introduce yourself or remind the person of your name** – and use their preferred name as often as you can.
- **Try picture cards or hand signals** (thumbs up, middle, and down) to identify likes and dislikes with someone who can't speak.
- **Try using smells to stimulate memories**; lavender or other herbs, spices, carbollic or coal tar soap, flowers, perfume, machine oil and tobacco can work well!
- **Try gentle movement.** Simple dance steps, stretching, clapping or swaying to music can awaken the body and mind.
- **Keep your language simple**, and demonstrate any activity to show what you mean. **Be encouraging and positive** in the way you speak and move.

Tip: Rhythm is a powerful tool, and hearing the rhythm of a poem, song or proverb can prompt people to remember the lyrics or evoke a memory. Try some 'What comes next...?' games, with well-known sayings e.g. 'A bird in the hand is worth... (two in the bush)', song lyrics e.g. 'The hills are alive... (with the sound of music)', or film titles 'The King and... (I)'.



Tom says:

"Don't be afraid of silence. Trust that you can give me comfort or enjoyment just by being with me and holding my hand or linking arms."

Tip: For most people living with dementia, it's the experience in the here and now that counts – being 'in the moment' e.g. listening to music. The good feelings from a positive interaction or special moment can stay with someone for a considerable time...

WORKING TOGETHER

Here are some ideas for things you could do with your colleagues:

1 Create rummage or memory boxes.

A rummage box contains sensory items such as colourful scarves, feathers, household items, hats, and things to fold and sort, feel, squeeze, pull, etc. A general memory box could contain old coins, newspapers, tins, and sports memorabilia (you can find some items cheaply on the internet, jumble sales and charity shops) - or you can build up a personal box for each person.

2 Start a life story project.

Each of you shares one fact about a resident every week in a note book or on the staff room wall. Where possible involve the resident themselves and decorate their door with a fact sheet about their life, e.g. job, family, talents, interests, favourite music. You'll build up a colourful picture of that person's life which can be used in your daily interactions.

3 Find out about residents' favourite songs.

Music is a wonderful source of pleasure and memories; you may learn more about important times in the person's life, or just share in their enjoyment. Try creating personal playlists for residents so they can listen to their music any time. ◀

See Resources p. 12



BRINGING THE OUTSIDE IN

A change of scene can be good for all of us. It's important to support people to go outside (e.g. into the garden, to a local shop, café or local park), **but there are also many ways to bring the outside world in:**

- **“I saw this and thought of you...”** Talk with people about something you watched on TV, or bring in an article or story they might enjoy.
- **Use special events** e.g. have a film night when the Oscars are on, or enjoy shortbread and share stories about Scotland for Burn's night on 25 January.
- **If you have residents from different cultural backgrounds**, can you bring in food, images or music related to their culture?
- **If you can access the internet**, try exploring YouTube for people's interests or search the web and Google Street View for favourite places.



- **Enjoy the seasons** – you could bring in conkers, leaves or berries in the autumn, flowers in the spring and summer, or pine cones in the winter.
- **The garden** - can you try some indoor or outdoor gardening? Or sit with someone and enjoy the garden from the window, or share a walk there?
- **Can you help build a link with a local school** to give residents contact with younger people? Or do you have links to involve other community groups?

And finally...

We can't always get it right – but the important thing is to keep trying, be positive, and stay open to opportunities that mean you can make a difference to the people you care for.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Here are some links to more practical information, ideas and resources:

Alive! is a charity dedicated to improving quality of life for older people in care through meaningful activity. We provide a range of person-centred activity sessions and we offer training for care home staff. www.aliveactivities.org

Alive! also hosts an **online forum** for care staff and activity co-ordinators to share ideas for activities, find resources and feel supported – anyone can join.

<http://aliveforum.aliveactivities.org>

Memory apps for dementia – a website with the latest app recommendations for touchscreen tablets, and ideas for how to use them with individuals or groups of older people. www.memoryappsfordementia.org

Living well through activity in care homes: the toolkit – care home staff resources (Royal College of Occupational Therapists) This comprehensive toolkit has a wealth of ideas for engaging with residents and is well worth a look.

www.cot.co.uk/living-well-through-activity-care-homes-toolkit-0

- **Using ICT in activities for people with dementia** (Social Care Institute for Excellence). Short and really useful guide to using the internet , including iPads and phones, with people living with dementia.

<http://www.scie.org.uk/dementia/supporting-people-with-dementia/ictfordementia/files/ictfordementia.pdf>

- **Playlist For Life** is a charity providing advice and training on how to create a playlist of personally meaningful music on an iPod for people living with dementia.

www.playlistforlife.org.uk

This guide has been produced working in partnership with Bristol City Council www.bristol.gov.uk

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Alive! would love to hear your feedback about this guide, please contact us on **0117 377 3756** or info@aliveactivities.org