

Visiting Activities

Before the Information Sharing

Goals



- To talk about the challenges associated with visiting when a family member is in a long-term care facility.
- To normalize the feelings of guilt and grief that caregivers often feel when their person transitions to facility care.
- To identify strategies to enhance visiting time.
- To talk about ways of keeping the person connected to the caregiver and other family members.



Handouts

“Visiting Activities”



Please Note

Since visiting a person with dementia involves using some basic communication skills, you might want to present one or both of the discussion segments on “Communicating with People with Dementia” before or soon after this session.

- Encourage members to talk openly about the sense of obligation or duty that is sometimes attached to visiting. There is no right or wrong length of time or frequency to visit the person with dementia. Encourage the group to recognize that their needs are also important when considering the issue of visiting.
- Exploring caregivers’ motivations for visiting could uncover some grief. The reality of seeing a family member living in a care facility can bring back grief or guilt that can sometimes interfere with visiting. For example, spouses and adult children may feel a tremendous weight of guilt for having made the decision to place their family member in care, especially in the first few months following placement. Caregivers may experience grief over the person’s loss of independence or their perceived loss of dignity, grief over the loss of the prior relationship, or grief over the loss of a parental figure. Be prepared to provide a safe environment for group members wanting to share their grief.

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Information Sharing with the Group



Questions to ask the Group

- What are some of the things that make visiting a challenge?
- What makes a “good” visit? What do you hope to get out of your visits with the person with dementia?
 - Are your expectations met?
 - Are your expectations realistic?
- What about when your family doesn’t recognize you? How do you handle that? How does it make you feel when that happens?
- What are some of the ways we can maintain our relationship with the person even though their living circumstances have changed? How can we keep them connected to other family members?
- What are some of the strategies you've tried that have made your visits more successful?
- How has your life changed since your family member moved into the care facility?



Facilitator's notes

The following points may arrive naturally during the course of the discussion, or you may want to refer to them to help guide the discussion.

Visiting in the most basic sense is about “being present” or “being in the moment” with the person you are visiting. If you are not providing day-to-day care, visiting is a primary way of staying connected to the person with dementia. By visiting, you are saying to the person with dementia that they belong to a family circle and that they are loved. You may feel that you want to continue well-established routines and make visits around these activities, such as sharing a meal together. Keep in mind that even after the person can no longer talk, there is still a core of feelings and a sense of self that can be reached - maybe by just being there or holding hands.

- Visits can be made more social by joining in a group activity at the long-term care facility, such as a musical event.
- Visits can also be more personal—you can spend quiet time alone reading, reminiscing or just sharing peace and quiet together.
- Visits from family members can help the person maintain a sense of connection with their past and their identity. Be careful not to overwhelm the person with too much activity or noise.
- Ideally, a visit should be pleasant for both parties. Even if your family member does not remember the visit after you are gone, they will still have enjoyed their time with you. The visit also confirms to them that someone cares. Furthermore, the joy and other positive emotions they experienced during your visit will stay with them long after you are gone.
- Be aware of your motivations for visiting the person with dementia. Unrealistic expectations that the visitor brings to the visiting experience can make visiting difficult for some people.
- Look at what needs to happen to make your visits more satisfying for you and your family member.

When visiting

- Do not rush things. Let the person with dementia set the pace.
- Arrange a time for the visit that is best for the person.
- Be flexible—if the person appears agitated, walks away, or does not seem interested, try coming back another time when they might be more receptive.

- Do not correct the person if they use the wrong word, get people's names wrong, or think that they are twenty years old. To remain connected, you need to be prepared to adjust to their reality. You have to adapt to their world, because they cannot adapt to yours.
- Come prepared: bring magazines, photographs, picture books, or other items that might help stimulate conversation or reminiscing.
- Talk about the past.
- Visit during scheduled activities and encourage the person to participate.
- Be prepared to have other residents join in your conversations and activities, as some of them have very few visitors.
- It is sometimes difficult for the person with dementia to talk; it is okay to visit without talking and to enjoy a connection by holding hands or even singing quietly.
- If you are doing an activity together, focus on the skills that the person with dementia still has. "Don't tell me what I can't do; tell me what I can do!"

Why encourage people with dementia to participate in activities?

Your visit can make a big difference to the quality of life of your family member. Even though most long-term care facilities encourage residents to participate in a variety of activities, the reality is that there is often a high level of because there isn't enough staff to ensure that everyone gets involved. Participating in activities can reduce:

- levels of depression
- challenging behaviour
- accidental falls
- dependency



Handouts

Distribute handouts and choose the points that you want to review with group members.

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In Conclusion

- Visiting can be very important for the quality of life of the person with dementia.
- It is important to understand our motivations and expectations in regards to visiting the person with dementia. These expectations should remain realistic.
- There is no right or wrong length of time or frequency to visit the person with dementia. Visits do not have to be long.
- Being prepared, choosing a good time for the visit, and possibly an activity to do with your loved one with dementia will enhance your visits.
- Keep in mind that if you are visiting in a long-term care facility, you will need to take into account the care facility's surroundings, activities, routine, staff, and other residents.
- Generally, long-term care facilities will allow you to visit at any time, but check ahead with your specific facility.



