



About *Just for Families...*

Just for Families is a series of information brochures developed by the Inglewood Family/Community Advisory Board and published by Inglewood Care Centre. We believe family members are valuable members of Inglewood's care team. By better understanding aging, medical concerns and other issues affecting the residents, families can work with staff to ensure residents receive the highest quality of care.

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Just for Families...

When you visit someone with dementia...

Simple ways to connect



Inglewood Care Centre

"Make your loved ones feel that they are being taken seriously, that they are still loved, still worthy of respect, still adults. That is what you strive for. That is the gift you bring."

Claudia J. Strauss

What can a 'good' visit do for you and the resident?

Your family member feels loved, valued and cared *about*—not just cared for.

A good visit provides comfort and reassurance to you, too. You know that you can still make a positive difference in your family member's life. And that's a good reason to continue to visit.

7 things we need to remember

- 1 People with dementia are doing the best they can.
Imagine how difficult it is to live in our complex world when your brain is increasingly damaged.
- 2 We need to live in their world.
A 90-year-old may be waiting for her mother to take her to school. Don't point out her mother has been dead for 30 years. Instead, make a positive comment about her mother, or ask what she likes best about school.

- 3 Think about your body language. People with dementia are like a mirror. They are very aware of non verbal signals such as your facial expression, body tension and mood, and often reflect back those emotions. Are you frowning? Arms folded? Try smiling. Your calm, gentle approach will be contagious.
- 4 "Who are you?" Don't take it personally. When a family member or friend doesn't recognize who we are or doesn't know our name, it can be sad for us. Remember—they know whom they're happy to see, and who loves them, even if they can't always express it. You can help. Say who you are and why you are there. "Hi, Mom. It's me, Jim, your only son! I've come to have tea with you!" Visit often enough so they can remember they *know* you—even if they don't know *who* you are.
- 5 How to talk when it's hard to understand.
Language becomes more limited or garbled in the later stages of dementia. Even if you can't understand what's being said, you can respond to the tone of voice in a way that says 'I'm listening to you' e.g., *You always have something interesting to say!..You are such a good storyteller...*
- 6 Respond to their emotions.
They may tell you they haven't had anything to eat for three days, that their parents never came to pick them up, that they need to get home to cook their

children's dinner. At the emotional level, they may be letting you know that they are confused, depressed, scared, frustrated, lonely, or angry, or a combination of these feelings.*

You can respond to that emotion e.g., *That's really frustrating, isn't it?... I'm glad you told me that. It's a good thing we've got each other.* Remember, it's not so much what you say, but how you say it. Speak gently and affectionately. Hugs or hand-holding says volumes.

7 Let them know they are giving you something important.

One-sided relationships are uncomfortable. Find ways to tell your family member how much they give to you. Some examples*:

- This is so relaxing, sitting here with you.
- I enjoy your company so much.
- That's interesting. I'm going to want to think about that.
- You are always so calm. I hope I can learn from you.
- With all that walking, you get more exercise than I do. I'm going to try to follow your example.
- Your smile always makes my day.
- I don't know how you do it, but you always make me laugh!

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Tips to make your visit more meaningful

- **Go at your family member's pace.** People with dementia often need more time to respond. Use slow, gentle motions. Slow down the pace when you talk. Make sure you have your family member's attention. Sit down at eye level. Make eye contact. Smile. Use gentle touch. Use loving words.
- **Find out the best time to visit.** Generally, people with dementia are more alert during late mornings and early afternoons. Ask staff members who know your family member.
- **Enjoy the silence.** Silence can be a shared and touching experience. Find a quiet area, without TV or radio. Hold hands. Sit and watch together.
- **Watch for fatigue.** Signs of tiredness could include repeating conversations, irritability, walking away from you or asking you to leave. A short visit may be better than a long one.
- **Praise!** Tell your relative how good they are at something. Or how they helped you. *You make the best pies! Nobody dances like you do, honey! I'm a good driver because you taught me, Dad.*
- **See the world.** Don't let a wheelchair mean the end of outings. Ask staff about accessible taxi service or upcoming bus outings.

- **Ask for advice instead of facts.** Someone with memory problems may not recall how many children they have, or if they even *have* children, but some retain insight that allows them to offer advice when asked e.g., *Do you think my husband and I should have just one child, or three or four?*
- **Come prepared to do something.** People with dementia are often unable to 'entertain.' Bring a photo album, colourful magazine or favourite music to enjoy together. Bring a picnic. Stroll in the garden.
- **Focus on the physical senses.** While a person with advanced dementia may have lost most cognitive abilities, he or she is still capable of experiencing the world through physical sensations: stroking a pet, licking an ice cream cone, listening to favourite music, or holding a flower.
- **Visit when you *want* to visit, not when you think you *should* visit.** People with dementia are very sensitive to emotion. They may sense your reluctance and fatigue.
- **Receive as well as give.** The one who gives comfort can also receive. Residents are typically 'cared for.' Allow them to give to *you*. Ask your family member to brush *your* hair, to hold *your* hand. Tell them you enjoy being a guest in their home.

- **Trouble leaving?** If asked, offer *"I have to get some groceries but I'll be back"* or *"I have to pick the children up at school"* or *"The office needs my help for a few hours."* TIP: leave your coat/purse locked in the car. These are visual cues you are 'leaving.' Staff can also distract your family member.
- **Most of all, enjoy each other while you're here!** End your visit with *I'll see you soon* or *I love you!*

Remember

the person who was.

Cherish the person
who is.

Want to know more?

Here's a wonderful book. We highly recommend Claudia J. Strauss' paperback *Talking to Alzheimer's* by New Harbinger Publications, 2001. It's quick to read, clearly written, warm and wise—and full of practical visiting ideas. You'll find answers for such tough questions as *Why am I here? What do I do now?* and *Please take me home!*

Look for Inglewood's other brochure, too: *Visiting Tips.*