



# Making the Most of Your Visit

## Tips for Visiting Someone in a Memory Care Setting

### Introduction

Visiting a loved one in a memory care setting can be emotionally complex. It may feel awkward at first, especially if the person has progressed in their dementia journey and communication has changed. However, these visits can be profoundly meaningful—for both the visitor and the person living with memory loss. With preparation, patience, and compassion, your time together can be warm, engaging, and beneficial. This whitepaper offers guidance and practical tips to help make your visits more comfortable and meaningful.

### 1. Understanding the Experience

It's *normal* to feel unsure of what to say or do! Dementia affects memory, language, and behavior, which can change the way your loved one interacts. Understanding this helps set realistic expectations and reduces the stress of visiting.



- **Accept changes:** The person may not recognize you or may repeat stories. This isn't personal; it's a symptom of their condition.
- **Focus on presence, not performance:** You don't need to "fix" anything. Just being there is meaningful.
- **Adapt communication:** Speak clearly and gently. Use short sentences and allow time for responses. A person with dementia may take up to 30 seconds to process what you said!

## 2. Making the Visit Pleasant

*A positive visit starts with the right mindset and environment.*

- **Plan ahead:** Choose a time of day when your loved one is usually more alert.
- **Keep visits brief:** Especially in later stages, short, frequent visits are often better than longer ones.
- **Limit distractions:** Visit in a quiet area to help with focus and reduce overstimulation.
- **Bring familiar items:** A photo album, a favorite snack, or a beloved book can spark recognition and conversation.

## 3. How to Communicate Effectively

- **Use nonverbal cues:** A smile, gentle touch (when appropriate), and eye contact convey warmth and connection.
- **Go with the flow:** If they say something that isn't accurate, try not to correct them. It is not really about what they are saying, but the emotion behind it.
- **Repeat and rephrase when needed:** If they don't understand something, try saying it a different way rather than repeating the same words. Gentle repetition and paraphrasing can support understanding.
- **Share stories and memories:** Talk about the past, especially earlier memories which are sometimes better preserved. Bring visual aids such as pictures or keepsakes.

## 4. Activities to Do Together by Stage

*Early Stage Memory Loss:*

- Take a walk together
- Look through photo albums and reminisce
- Do larger piece puzzles or play cards
- Make a snack together or tend to a houseplant

*Middle Stage Memory Loss:*

- Read aloud from a familiar book or magazine
- Watch a nature video or family home movie
- Do a simple craft or art project
- Help them with a familiar task like folding towels

## VISIT SUCCESS CHECKLIST



### Later Stage Memory Loss:

- Hold their hand and sit quietly together
- Play calming music or sing to them
- Use sensory items like a soft blanket or aromatherapy
- Read poetry or scripture to them

## 5. How to Say Goodbye

Parting ways at the end of a visit can be emotionally challenging—for both the visitor and the person with dementia. Having a plan for saying goodbye can help ease this moment.

- **Keep it short and sweet:** Avoid drawn-out explanations or emotional goodbyes. A simple, calm farewell is best.
- **Avoid saying, “I have to go home”:** This can trigger feelings of confusion or even abandonment.
- **Leave them with positive feelings:** Be cheerful, not sad. You don’t need to promise you’ll be back soon—or even at all.
- **Use comforting, plausible phrases. Say things like:**
  - *“I need to go to work, I’ll be back soon.”*
  - *“I have an appointment, but I’ll be back later.”*
  - *“I need to use the bathroom. I’ll be right back.”*

One of the bittersweet realities of dementia is that once you’re gone, your loved one may not remember exactly what you said—or even that you visited. But they will remember how you made them feel. Aim to create a warm, positive moment that lingers emotionally, even if the memory fades.

- **Involve staff if needed:** If your loved one becomes upset during goodbyes, a staff member may be able to help redirect their attention.
- **Create a goodbye ritual:** A consistent routine like a hug, special phrase, or wave from the doorway can bring comfort over time.
- **Leave with love, not guilt:** *Remind yourself that your visit had value, even if it wasn’t remembered. What matters is the emotional connection you shared in the moment.*



## 6. Self-Care for the Visitor

Taking care of yourself ensures you can continue to offer support.

- **Give yourself grace:** Feeling sad, frustrated, or unsure is okay.
- **Debrief after visits:** Talk to a friend or write in a journal if needed.
- **Educate yourself:** Learning more about dementia helps you respond with compassion. Knowledge is power.

## Conclusion

Every visit is an opportunity to connect in a meaningful way—even if words are limited. With empathy, creativity, and realistic expectations, you can make each moment together comforting and worthwhile. Remember: communication is a skill, and it improves with time and practice. Your presence matters more than anything.

## Resources

- Alzheimer's Association: [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)
- Dementia Friends: [www.dementiafriends.org](http://www.dementiafriends.org)
- Teepa Snow's Positive Approach to Care: [www.teepasnow.com](http://www.teepasnow.com)