

Tips for visiting – engaging with someone with cognitive decline

When someone has memory loss, is confused, becomes easily upset or doesn't talk very much, visiting can seem daunting.

It can be helpful to have some strategies to make home and residential care visits more comfortable.

1. Remind the person of who you are and how you know the person. Saying, "Hello Auntie Joan, it's Karen, your niece" will help reduce the person's anxiety about not remembering who you are.
2. Items from home can provide comfort. Taking something with you that you can share or talk about can help you reminisce and start a conversation.
3. Develop a flexible attitude – the person with cognitive decline may be better some days and worse on other days – it is important to remember that things may not go as planned but please remember that your visit was still valuable and can help the person be less depressed.
4. Keep the conversation steady – simple – explain things slowly – keep sentences short and give time for a response.
5. Visiting for short periods of time may be beneficial for both of you and for other visitors. Too many people may be overwhelming, so you might need to organise a visiting schedule.
6. You, care staff and the person you are visiting may find it useful to have a board in the room to list upcoming visitors.





7. Get to know the caring staff. Let them know how you know the person and any routines that might be possible to continue in care.
8. Silence can feel difficult, but it has a valuable role – learn to enjoy the quiet times.
9. Offer to make the person you came to visit a cup of tea – it will help maintain social interaction.
10. Make sure when you leave for the day that everything is in reach – glasses, hearing aids, mobility aids etc.
11. Make a communication or life book or both – a place where memories can be made and can be read or viewed again.
12. Include a small activity in your visit – maybe some knitting, drawing, a simple game or taking the person for a walk. This will help stimulate conversation.
13. Music can bring back many memories, provide some relaxation and feelings of calm. You could bring in an instrument or some prerecorded music. It is useful for staff if they have some knowledge of the person's interests – family members, pets, music, likes and dislikes etc.
14. If the person you are visiting had a pet it may be worth asking staff if you are able to bring the pet in for a short visit (or some recent photos of the pet or even do a video call).
15. You may like to read to the person you came to visit – a soft and calming voice may be valuable. Think about the type of books the person would enjoy.
16. Look after yourself – visiting may be challenging, and bring up feelings of sadness, frustration or grief. Give yourself time to manage those feelings – you may find it helpful to talk to someone you trust or do something you enjoy after.

Please remember you don't have to say anything – you can be present without saying a word – your entire visit does not need to be filled with conversation – being present in the moment is enough.

