



Whether you would like to host virtual meetings with individual clients or you are planning a group meeting/program, these tips can help attendees who may be living with dementia to maximize their independence, feel less frustration and get the most out of your meeting.

Virtual meetings offer several benefits for people living with dementia and their care partners. They provide convenience by eliminating transportation and reducing preparation time. The flexibility of virtual meetings allows for easier scheduling, while the comfort and accessibility of home add to the appeal. Additionally, participants can connect with others beyond their local area. However, challenges such as distractions, privacy concerns and difficulty reading body language or social cues can arise. Technical issues, like glitches or unfamiliarity with the platform, can also disrupt meetings and cause frustration. Read on for tips to help your virtual meetings run as smoothly as possible.

Prepare ahead of time

- **Choose a platform:** When choosing a platform for your virtual meetings, consider that some options are more user-friendly than others. Some platforms may have less intuitive controls or require frequent updates, which can be frustrating for users.
- **Will it be a virtual video meeting vs. virtual call?** If your client is having trouble logging into a virtual meeting, consider setting up a virtual call instead where they can simply press one button to answer on their mobile device.
- **Reduce the number of buttons to push and reduce distractions.** Adjust the meeting settings to make it easier for attendees to join, participate and leave. Consider these options:
 - Allow attendees to bypass the waiting room or lobby to reduce confusion.
 - Turn off announcements when participants join or leave to minimize distractions, especially if multiple people are attending.
 - Limit meeting controls by disabling features like screen sharing and presenter permissions for attendees.
- **Send a simple tip sheet** to attendees ahead of time with the following information:
 - The platform you will be using.
 - How to prepare for the meeting (e.g., set up their camera, ensure the microphone is working and have someone help them log on if needed).

- How to access the meeting from an email invitation/reminder.
- How to use basic controls during the meeting (e.g., turning the microphone and camera on and off, leaving the meeting).
- Tips for ensuring comfort (e.g., choosing a spot where you can comfortably remain seated throughout), focus (e.g., reduce background noise, have a snack or water available, etc.) and privacy (e.g., wearing headphones, choosing a secluded space, opting to blur or choose a virtual background to hide the rest of the environment).

For more guidance on preparing dementia-friendly documents, please refer to Tips for Dementia-Friendly Written Material which can be found at alzheimer.ca/dfc/resources.

- **Ask the attendee(s) the following questions:**

- **Time of day:** What time of day is best for them to participate in a virtual meeting? When do they feel at their best? Do they prefer a meeting time when someone is available to assist them?
- **Communication preference:** What are their communication preferences and how can you assist if they experience challenges during the meeting? If you have access to multiple platforms, ask which one they are most familiar with or prefer.
- **Reminders:** Would they like a meeting reminder? If so, when should it be sent (e.g., the day before or same day) and how would they like to be reminded (e.g., by phone, email or through a trusted person)?
- **Device:** What type of device will they be using to access the virtual meeting? This information can guide you in providing clear and simple technical support, such as helping them locate their meeting control buttons.
- Ensure that your image is clear, well-lit and uncluttered.
 - **Camera position:** Position your camera at eye level and in front of you to create the appearance of direct eye contact with attendees. This helps convey your full attention and allows them to see your lips and facial expressions, which supports their understanding. A good rule of thumb is to have your face fill about two-thirds of the screen, with some space above your head and around your shoulders. Avoid looking up or down into the camera, as this can appear awkward or intimidating.



- **Lighting:** Avoid having a light source behind you, as it can obscure your face. If possible, place a soft light source behind the camera to illuminate your face.
- **Distractions:** Eliminate distractions in your background. Ensure the space behind you is uncluttered and free from people or other stimuli. Consider setting up in front of a blank wall that contrasts slightly with your clothing.

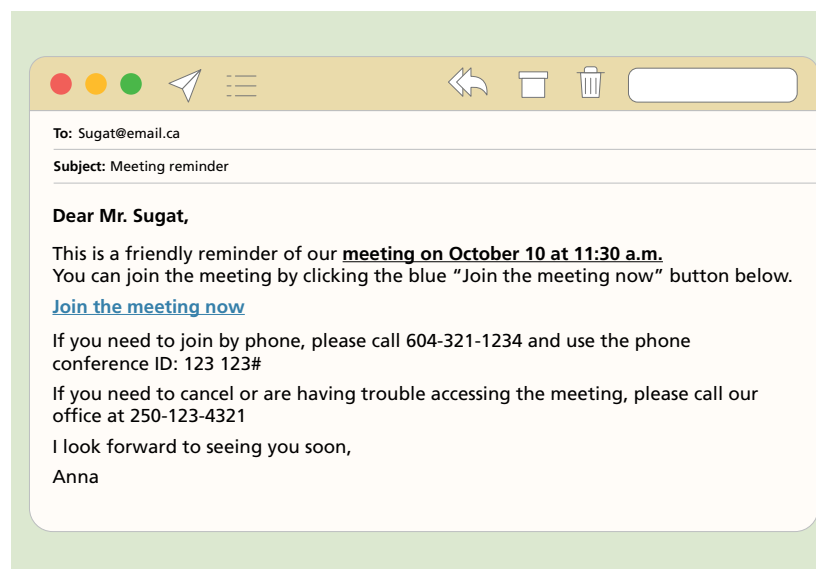
A note on blurred or virtual backgrounds:

Blurred or virtual backgrounds have both advantages and drawbacks. They can provide privacy for an attendee that can't move to a more secluded spot, but some people find them disorienting, especially if they are busy, glitching or cause parts of the person to disappear. If you choose to use a virtual background, it's best to select a solid, low-volume color that contrasts with your clothing.

Before the meeting

- **Keep the agenda simple and be prepared:** Gather all the documents you need to avoid keeping the attendees waiting while you are in the meeting. Time permitting, open the meeting 5-10 minutes before the start time to address any technology challenges or questions before the meeting starts.
- **If requested, send a dementia-friendly meeting reminder:** If the attendee has requested an additional reminder

after the meeting invite has been sent, consider sending this in an email that contains just the main information, with key words highlighted and the "Join the meeting" button enlarged. For example:



- **Allow extra time:** Schedule enough time so that you are not rushed if the meeting is delayed or goes late. You may need more time to connect with the person.
- **Minimize distractions:** Set your phone to 'do not disturb' and ensure that any app notifications are turned to silent.

Adapting in-person communication tips for virtual meetings

Many in-person communication tips apply to virtual meetings with some adjustments:

- At the start of the meeting, share your screen or show a slide with screenshots to **help attendees locate key controls** (e.g., microphone, camera, raise hand, chat and leave meeting).

- **Reduce distractions** by choosing a simple background and ensuring there's minimal noise or stimulation in your environment. You may need to gently remind the attendee to do the same: "I'm having trouble hearing you clearly. Would it be OK to turn off the TV for now?"
- **Accentuate facial expressions and gestures** to reinforce your message. For example, an exaggerated head nod or thumbs-up can emphasize agreement more effectively than just saying "mmhmm" or "I agree."



- **Use physical props** to enhance communication. For instance, show a calendar when discussing dates, point to your watch to indicate the meeting is almost over, or, if needed, hold up a

card with a microphone image and point to where the button is on their screen to demonstrate how/where to unmute their microphone.

- **Allow extra time for response.** Just like in-person interactions, people living with dementia may need more time to process and respond. In virtual meetings, they may also need time to unmute or type a response. Give plenty of time while offering an encouraging smile to avoid interrupting or talking over them.
- **Remain flexible and open to the idea of trying again later.** If the person you're meeting with appears overwhelmed or confused, it may be best to postpone the virtual meeting. Conclude the meeting early, if necessary, in a way that preserves the dignity of the person living with dementia, ensuring they don't feel embarrassed or inadequate.

For more information, quick reference tip sheets and short videos on communication tips, please visit the Dementia-Friendly Canada resources page at alzheimer.ca/dfc/resources.

For more information, or to learn more about dementia and dementia-friendly communities, reach out to your local **Alzheimer Society** or visit the **Dementia-Friendly Canada website**.



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