

Communicating with Clients Living with Dementia While Protecting Ourselves

Let's Remember:

Due to the ongoing concerns related to COVID-19, Person's Living with Dementia may experience increased anxiety and/or confusion. Person's Living with Dementia may currently be isolated from family, friends and loved ones due to current visiting restrictions which may be impacting their mental health and ability to socialize with others.

In addition, for the safety of both Person's Living with Dementia and health care workers, the use of PPE - Personal Protective Equipment (Such as Masks) - may limit or hinder the ability for Person's Living with Dementia to connect with their health care workers. Existing behavioural and psychological symptoms may be heightened, and Person's Living with Dementia may be at a greater risk of developing new or progressing Responsive Behaviours and/or Delirium.

What They See:

- Person's Living with Dementia are likely unaware of current events and may have difficulty understanding the need for additional PPE & precautions in place. *These precautions may be stressful for them.*
- Person's Living with Dementia often rely on body language and facial expressions during interactions, especially when language is affected. PPE can act as an additional barrier to their understanding of their environment and health care workers.

Supplementing Communication & Emotional Support:

- Allow time for Person's Living with Dementia to process who is approaching them (This may take approximately 30-40 seconds). Person's Living with Dementia may require additional time to understand what is being asked of them as masks can further distort their ability to recognize faces.
- Be especially aware of your tone and volume. *It would be beneficial to animate tone whenever possible to supplement reduced facial visibility.*
- Be aware of eye contact and expression of eyes/eyebrows during interactions- **Utilize what pieces of your face are exposed to supplement communication.** Remember any cultural considerations regarding eye contact.
- If it is safe to do so, offering personal contact when providing Emotional Support can provide added comfort & familiarity. Remember any personal and/or cultural considerations regarding personal contact.
- Person's Living with Dementia may have difficulty recognizing previously familiar staff members. Be sure to use their name often when providing instructions to maintain attention.
- If Person's Living with Dementia have questions surrounding precautions or PPE, provide simplified explanations.
- When providing Emotional Support consider the following:
 - **Validate:** the person's reality & emotional state ("*I know these masks might seem a little odd*")
 - **Distract:** by supplying them with an activity of interest
 - **Redirection:** completely change the topic to something less distressing or confusing
- Be mindful of your own non-verbal cues that the Person's Living with Dementia may be responding to (body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions). It is important that you remain calm. Strategies might include:
 - Ensure you are **breathing** (It sounds silly, but sometimes we forget!)
 - If you are feeling overwhelmed, **take a minute**. Check in with a team member, go to a quiet space, take a few minutes to ground yourself. Stretch!
 - Don't forget to **laugh** or **dance!** Your happiness will be contagious!

Reminder for Self-Care:

Many staff are likely dealing with increased workloads and/or added stress both in the workplace & at home. It is important for Staff to look after their own Physical & Mental Health during these times.

Thank you for all that you do!