

Created in partnership with



Alzheimer Society

WATERLOO WELLINGTON



SAFE PATHWAYS

Supporting dementia in the justice system



1 844 437 3247

(HERE247)

Call anytime to access  
Addictions, Mental Health  
& Crisis Services  
Waterloo-Wellington-Dufferin



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
Waterloo Wellington Dufferin



**H. Theresa Daly** Reg. N., MSW, RSW

Private Counselling for Caregivers and Seniors

Community Education and Consultation

Designated Capacity Assessor (Ontario)

Funded by:



*The views expressed in this publication are the views of the Recipient and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.*

# Safety Plan

A guide to safety planning for care partners  
of persons living with dementia

Different forms of dementia affect people in different ways, and depending on the area of the brain involved this may lead to changes in a person's behaviour and/or personality. People living with dementia may not understand that these changes are happening or that they are behaving differently.

It is important to note that these changes are caused by a brain disease and they should be investigated with the help of a health care provider. Care partners will also most likely need to change their *own* responses and routines to reduce triggers and risks. In particular, one form of dementia called Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD) may cause:

- **Progressive behaviour/personality changes such as:** inappropriate comments or impulsive actions.
- **Progressive language difficulties including:** 'getting the right words out', or understanding what is being said.
- **Progressive physical difficulties such as:** challenges with movement, frequent falls and/or poor coordination.

It is important to talk to someone who can help you cope with any personality and behaviour changes as soon as possible. It can also be helpful to talk about your own emotional reactions to the changes the person with dementia is experiencing.

Alzheimer Society Ontario. (2015). *Finding your way*.

Center for Public Safety and Justice, University of Illinois. (2014, July). *Alzheimer's Aware – caregivers and community awareness workshop and caregiver emergency plan project*.

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2014, March). *Violence prevention safety planning – escaping a violent relationship: violence prevention initiative*.

National Institute on Aging. (2010). *Frontotemporal disorders: information for patients, families and caregivers*.

Smart, R. *Alzheimer Society Guelph-Wellington. Safety planning: what should I do?*

Workman's Compensation Board of British Columbia. (2010). *WorkSafeBC. Dementia: Understanding risks and preventing violence*.

Waterloo Regional Police Services.  
<http://www.wrps.on.ca/staying-safe>



*The views expressed in this publication are the views of the Recipient and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.*

## Safety Programs for Persons with Dementia

If someone with dementia is missing, don't wait and don't search on your own. **Call 9-1-1 immediately.** Time is of the essence. Police would prefer to be alerted immediately.

***Finding Your Way - Free of charge.*** Identification kit that can be shared with emergency responders. Resources to help persons live safely with dementia are available in twelve languages. Call Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington at 519-836-7672 or visit [www.findingyourwayontario.ca](http://www.findingyourwayontario.ca)

\*Does *NOT* include a tracking device.

***Project Lifesaver - Charges may apply. Client must live in Guelph-Wellington.*** A radio transmitter tracking bracelet that emergency services can track if a person goes missing. Call Victim Services Wellington at 519-824-1212 ext. 7304

***Vulnerable Persons Registry - Free of charge.*** A registry with critical information (emergency contact, description, photo) accessed by emergency responders. Call 519-886-9150 or visit [www.vulnerablepersonsregistry.ca](http://www.vulnerablepersonsregistry.ca)

\*Does *NOT* include a tracking device.

***MedicAlert® Safely Home® - Charge apply.*** A MedicAlert® ID bracelet that includes medical information and 24 hr hotline. Call 1-855-581-3794 or visit [www.medicalert.ca/safely-home](http://www.medicalert.ca/safely-home)

\*Does *NOT* include a tracking device.

## Public Safety and Dementia

The police are dedicated to ensuring the safety of all who live, work and play in our community. Sometimes there might be situations that bring people living with dementia into contact with the police such as: giving inappropriate answers to questions; being unable to respond to questions; not being properly dressed for the weather; taking items from a store (but thinking they paid); not obeying the rules of the road; exhibiting inappropriate or harmful behaviour; and/or appearing to be lost or confused.

### Driving

Due to changes in the brain, a person with dementia may not be able to follow the rules of the road. If a person with dementia attempts to drive and is a danger to themselves or others on the road **call 9-1-1 immediately.**

### Behaviour

When responding to their environment, people with dementia may exhibit physical or verbal agitation that might be difficult to calm or redirect. This could be a response to misunderstanding a situation. If someone is exhibiting a behaviour that would put you or others at risk - leave the area, go to a safe place, and **call 9-1-1 immediately.** To learn about strategies regarding behaviour changes please call: Alzheimer Society Waterloo Wellington at 519-836-7672.

## Non-emergency Situations

A non-emergency situation occurs when there is no immediate damage or risk to the safety of persons or property. An example may include: when a person with dementia becomes upset, but there is no risk of abuse or violence. If you are experiencing a distressing but non-emergency situation, call a crisis line to discuss it with a professional. Refer to My Important Contact Numbers at the end of this booklet. If in doubt, call 9-1-1.

## When Should I Call 9-1-1? What is an Emergency?

Call 9-1-1 when there is an immediate risk to the safety of people. Some examples of a 9-1-1 emergency include: a medical emergency, when someone with dementia is lost or missing, you feel frightened or threatened by the behaviour of the person with dementia and are afraid for your safety or that of others. **NOTE:** If there is a sudden change in the person's cognition, behaviour, or health status call 9-1-1 or go to your nearest emergency room.

## IF IT IS AN EMERGENCY CALL 9-1-1 IMMEDIATELY

- You will be asked if you need police, fire, or ambulance.
- Describe your situation. Tell the dispatcher that your family member/ friend has dementia and the dispatcher will determine the best service to suit your needs. When emergency services arrive, you will be asked who you are and what occurred.

## Additional Resources

**Guelph Police Service**  
15 Wyndham St S. Guelph  
519-824-1212

**Waterloo Regional  
Police Service**  
200 Maple Grove Rd.  
Cambridge  
519-653-7700

**Canadian Mental Health  
Association — Court Support**  
80 Waterloo Ave.  
Guelph  
519-821-2060 x 2035

### Legal Aid

**Legal Clinic of Guelph**  
176 Wyndham St. N.  
Guelph  
1-800-628-9205

**Waterloo Region  
Community Legal Services**  
101-450 Frederick St.  
Kitchener  
519-743-0254

**Ontario Provincial Police**  
1-888-310-1122  
1-888-310-1133 (TTY)

**Elder Abuse Response Team  
(Waterloo Region)**  
400 Queen St. S.  
Kitchener  
519-579-4607

**Seniors at Risk  
(Guelph-Wellington)**  
80 Waterloo Ave.  
Guelph  
1-844-264-2993 x 2049

### Victim Services

**Wellington**  
15 Wyndham St S.  
Guelph  
519-824-1212 x 7304

**Waterloo Region**  
134 Frederick St.  
Kitchener  
519-585-2363

# My Important Contact Numbers

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Family                |  |
| Neighbour/Friends     |  |
| Co-Worker             |  |
| Health Care Providers |  |
| Community worker      |  |

If you are afraid for your safety or the safety of the person with dementia you can call 9-1-1 in an emergency and the services listed below for on-going assistance.

## Alzheimer Society

WATERLOO WELLINGTON

1145 Concession Rd. Cambridge N3H 4L5

69 Huron St. Guelph N1E 5L6

831 Frederick St. Kitchener N2B 2B4

8:30 am - 4:00 pm Monday - Friday

Phone/TTY: 519-836-7672 or 519-742-1422

[www.alzheimerww.ca](http://www.alzheimerww.ca)



**1 844 437 3247**  
(HERE247)

Call anytime to access  
Addictions, Mental Health  
& Crisis Services  
Waterloo-Wellington-Dufferin

# Police and Dementia

- It is helpful to have important documentation on hand such as identity and medical information. This could include information about the programs and registries that the person with dementia is registered with. **Note:** All medical needs will be addressed first and further assistance provided.
- The police will determine if the incident is criminal in nature and will investigate accordingly.
- If no charges are laid, the police and/or Victim Services can connect you to community supports.
- If charges are laid, you can call the Canadian Mental Health Association for court support services at 519-821-2060 x2035.
- Consider contacting a lawyer who specializes in criminal matters.

**NOTE:** A diagnosis of dementia does not preclude an individual from being charged criminally by the police. The use of weapons during a criminal offence, or the threat of a serious violent act and domestic violence incidents will be investigated thoroughly. Legislated requirements and policies mandate criminal charges for certain types of offences with emphasis on public safety. It is not the victim's choice whether charges are laid or not.

# Safety Planning

## Safety planning is “problem solving in advance”

Safety plans are tools that may increase safety for you and your family by helping you focus on your situation, your needs, and how you would get help. There are many factors that contribute towards making a situation risky or unsafe, such as: symptoms of dementia, health of people in the home, support systems in place, and an individual’s personal limits.

Some people who are providing care for a person living with dementia are willing to put themselves at risk rather than call the police in fear of what could happen to the person living with dementia.

Consider that your safety and that of the person with dementia is most important. When you are at risk, reaching out for help is the best way to protect yourself and the person you are caring for. Police and health care services will work with you to care for the person with dementia and protect the safety of everyone involved.

Many care partners push themselves to manage the care of a person with dementia beyond the point of safety. It is not a sign of weakness to ask for help or a break in order to cope.

# My Safety Plan

- If I think I cannot return to care for the person with dementia, I will have an emergency caregiving plan in place. I can prepare this plan in advance with the following person or organization:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- If I have a disability, I will plan for the care I would need if I cannot stay at home. The services I can call are:  
– Refer to My Important Contacts at the end of this booklet:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- If I have pets and have to leave quickly, I can leave my pets at this place for the short term:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I will review this plan every (week/month):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- The person who agreed to help me review this plan is (name and phone number):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- In my community these are the places I can go to learn more about keeping myself safe while I care for a person who has dementia – Refer to My Important Contacts at the end of this booklet:  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Keep this completed plan with your other important documentation for easy access in case of crisis.**

# My Safety Plan

- When under stress, the most difficult thing I find to change about myself is (e.g., getting angry):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I feel safe telling the following people about my situation:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I will prepare a travel bag to have ready in an emergency. The bag will include the following items (e.g., clothes, keys, medications, money, paperwork):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I will leave my travel bag in this area of the house or with this person (e.g. family, neighbor, or friend):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- If I sense danger, I will use the following code word or signal to tell my family/friends that I am in danger and they should call 9-1-1 (e.g., flashing light, knocking):  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I will plan my escape route in advance and practice leaving through this way. I can use the following doors, windows, elevators, stairwells or fire escapes to get out quickly and safely:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- If I have to leave the house in an emergency, I can go to the following (e.g., neighbor's, friend's or public area):  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Basic Safety Planning Strategies

## Communication Tips

- Treat the person as an adult. Even though brain damage can cause a loss of insight, the person with dementia still sees themselves as a fully functioning adult and should be treated as such.
- If the person with dementia is upset or angry, give them enough space so they feel safe, while still being able to observe the situation or wait for help.
- Try to acknowledge their emotions. For example, acknowledge that they are upset by naming their emotion such as *"I'm sorry you are feeling so....angry/frustrated/sad."*
- Let go of "being right" and avoid correcting. Instead of disagreeing (which can cause agitation), validate and acknowledge their experience, and try to gently redirect them.
- Respond to them in a calm tone and try not to rush.
- Use short, simple words, and ask yes or no questions.
- Keep good eye contact.
- Do not touch the person too quickly or too roughly.
- If you cannot calm down, remove yourself from the situation as soon as possible.
- Talk to the Alzheimer Society about strategies for coping with the changes you have observed.

# Basic Safety Planning Strategies

## What you can do in advance

- If you feel comfortable, tell your friends/family about your situation and how they can help. Do not ask friends to intervene directly if the situation is dangerous.
- Discuss with family, friends, or neighbours how you will notify them if you need help. Consider having a secret code word or signal, such as flashing a porch light or knocking on a wall.
- Pack a travel bag with a charged cell phone, car keys, money and personal information in a place where it is easy to grab and go.
- Keep emergency phone numbers on speed dial. Keep crisis and emergency numbers on hand including family, friends, and support services.
- Use your judgement and intuition. Acknowledge what the person with dementia needs. If the situation is unsafe, remove yourself from the situation until you are safe.
- Determine a safe room in your home where you can lock the door and call for help.
- Be proactive and remove or secure any dangerous objects. Call the police to dispose of fire arms.
- Have an escape route, try not to let yourself get cornered.

# Basic Safety Planning Strategies

- If you have medical needs, set up an emergency plan.
- For a non-emergency, or if the person with dementia has dramatic mood changes, and/or is showing uncontrolled anger or anxiety/agitation call crisis support services to talk about next steps. Refer to My Important Contact Numbers at the end of this booklet.

## What to do in a dangerous situation

- Move to a safe room or follow your exit route. Avoid the kitchen, garage, or other areas with weapons.
- If you are still in the house, and it is safe to do so, use your code word or signal to tell family or a friend, that you are in danger and that they should call 9-1-1.
- If you feel threatened, and are afraid for your safety or the safety of the person with dementia, **call 9-1-1 immediately** or ask a friend/family to do so. Inform the dispatcher that your family member/friend has dementia. You can leave the phone off the hook so the dispatcher can hear what is going on.
- Take your travel bag. Go to your designated safe place.
- Call your emergency contacts for help and support.
- Implement your plan to have someone support the person with dementia while you are away to ensure that they are safe.