

Level Up Your Powers of Observation

There's no single sign that someone is living with dementia, but over time you may start to notice patterns or subtle changes in how a person interacts with their environment or with others. So, dementia supportive communication starts with being mindful of both your surroundings and the people within them. This means paying attention to what is happening around you and how people are interacting with the space and one another.



Look for Signs That Someone Might Need Extra Support

Be aware of individuals who:

- Appear unsure of where to go, even in familiar areas.
- Repeat questions or struggle to follow instructions.
- Show signs of frustration, embarrassment, or anxiety.

Stay Aware Throughout a Conversation

Pay attention to:

- Signs of confusion or overload, like repeated questions, hesitation, or distraction.
- Changes in body language or tone, such as frustration, embarrassment, or relief.
- Moments of confidence or calm.
- Connection between companions.

Build on Positive Moments

Respond warmly when someone:

- Greets you with recognition or enthusiasm – even if they can't recall your name.
- Successfully completes a task they previously found challenging.
- Expresses pride, humour, or relief after finding their way or finishing an activity.
- Engages comfortably in small talk or sharing a story.

When you notice and acknowledge these moments, it can help build trust, confidence and reinforce a sense of belonging.

When you look out for subtle changes in mood or actions, you are able to adjust your behaviour to be as supportive as possible.

Simple Steps for Dementia Supportive Communication

1 Approach and Inquire

If you think someone may need help, start with a calm, respectful approach.

- Approach from the front with a friendly, open manner.
- Remove hats or sunglasses so your face is visible.
- Introduce yourself clearly and ask what help is needed.
- Give simple information and assist where you can, while leaving room for independence.

2 Communicate Clearly, Directly, and Simply

How you speak and listen makes all the difference. Here's a simple memory aid to use:

SPEAK

- **S**imple words:
Avoid jargon, metaphors, or jokes.
- **P**ause:
Give extra time, don't rush, don't interrupt.
- **E**ngage directly:
Speak to the person, not about them.
- **A**ttentive body language:
Eye contact, open posture.
- **K**ind tone:
Warmth goes a long way.

3 Support Their Reality


Correcting often increases stress. Instead, focus on connection.

- Connect, don't correct – focus on feelings, not facts.
- Try to see how the person is perceiving the situation.
- Invite them to share more about what they're trying to do.

4 Consider Care Partners

Supporting a person living with dementia also means supporting their care partner.

- Be a listening ear and show patience.
- Involve them and check in on their needs.
- Look for cues about how they and the person with dementia work together.


 **If the person living with dementia is unsure, you can redirect the question to the care partner – but always include both.**



Simple Steps to Help an Emotional Garden Flourish

Build trust by planting the seeds of connection

- Learn a name.** Use it naturally to signal recognition and respect.
- Remember one detail.** A favourite coffee, a hobby, or the name of their dog.
- Start a short conversation.** Ask how their day is going or comment on something you both notice.
- Show genuine curiosity.** Ask about their work, interests, or volunteer role.
- Be reliable.** Follow through on small promises (“I’ll save you a seat next week”).
- Offer steady tone and presence.** A calm voice and predictable greeting build comfort over time.
- Find shared ground.** Talk about things you both enjoy, such as a local event, sports team, or weather pattern (very Albertan!).
- Acknowledge effort.** A simple “I always appreciate how you...” can mean a lot.

 **Remember:** trust grows through repetition. It’s the steady rhythm of recognition, not grand gestures, that makes people feel connected.

Build community by maintaining and nurturing connections

- Say hello when you see them.** Recognition builds confidence and belonging.
- Check in occasionally.** A short message or casual “Haven’t seen you in a while, how are you?” goes far.
- Share moments, not just updates.** Mention something small you enjoyed recently or thank them for something they contributed.
- Take part in community life.** Attend local events, volunteer, or join neighbourhood activities where familiar faces overlap.
- Notice changes with care.** If someone seems off, ask gently or offer a kind word without judgment.
- Encourage continuity.** Reinforce routines (“Same time next week?”) to keep friendly patterns going.
- Build strong networks.** Introduce people with shared interests to expand everyone’s circle.
- Celebrate milestones.** A quick “Happy birthday!” or “Congrats on the new job!” helps relationships stay warm.

Having Constructive Conversations About Dementia Supportive Communities

Talking about Dementia Supportive Communities can feel uncomfortable at first, but simple strategies can help you feel prepared and confident.

1 Imagine a Dementia Supportive Community in your mind and describe it in your own words.

It's easier to get people excited about a future they can imagine clearly.

Example: "When I imagine a Dementia Supportive Community, I see people who always feel comfortable doing what they need to do and going where they want to go."

2 Share stories or lived experience to help people connect emotionally and remember the message.

It's okay if the story isn't "perfect", but be mindful of privacy and consent and consider the dignity of the people involved.

Example: "The customer shared how much easier they found doing their shopping during the early quiet time. They now shop at that time every week!"

3 Share your own meaningful experiences and impacts.

The most effective conversations are grounded in your own experience.

Example: "Thinking about dementia in terms of the different thinking 'lines' really helped me to focus on feelings when I talk with someone living with dementia."

4 Match the message to the audience.

Different audiences care about different things.

- **With colleagues or managers**, focus on practical benefits and alignment with values
- **With customers, clients, or community members**, focus on stories, resources and support
- **With friends, neighbours, or family**, focus on empathy and everyday understanding, and opportunities for involvement

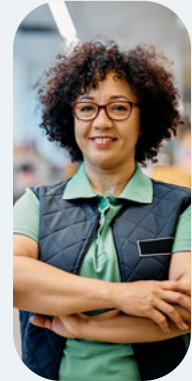
5 Make support visible and invite curiosity.

Sharing the message isn't about telling people what to do, it's about opening the door and creating opportunities for people to learn and do more.

Examples: "If you ever need it, the Alzheimer Society has really helpful resources – here is a link to their webpage," or "I'm happy to share more if you're interested."

Moving Forward, Together: Creating Dementia Supportive Communities the Right Way

1




Guidance for Community Members

Dementia Supportive Communities are strongest when they are shaped **with** people living with dementia and their care partners, not just **for** them. People with lived experience bring unique insight into what feels welcoming, what creates barriers, and what truly makes a difference in daily life.

As any member of the community, you can support meaningful engagement through everyday interactions and choices.

- Pay attention to non-verbal cues and changes in comfort, confidence, or engagement.
- Meet people where they are by being ready with both open-ended questions (“What would make this easier?” or “How does this feel for you?”) and close-ended questions (“Would you prefer the chocolate cake or oatmeal cookie”).
- Share observations respectfully with organizations or spaces that are trying to improve.
- Seek opportunities to build or strengthen relationships with people living with dementia.

Small moments of listening and validation help build trust, and trust is the foundation of meaningful inclusion.

 **Amplifying impact means not only sharing the message, but sharing power, listening deeply, and moving forward together.**

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Moving Forward, Together: Creating Dementia Supportive Communities the Right Way

2




Guidance for Public-Facing Staff Members or Volunteers

Dementia Supportive Communities are strongest when they are shaped **with** people living with dementia and their care partners, not just **for** them. People with lived experience bring unique insight into what feels welcoming, what creates barriers, and what truly makes a difference in daily life.

Public-facing staff members and volunteers are often closest to the day-to-day experiences of people living with dementia and are well-positioned to gather insight.

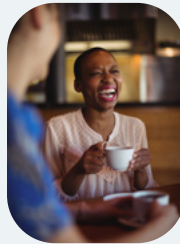
- Be curious when someone shares something with you (e.g. feedback or personal experiences).
- Look for patterns: What seems to work well? Where do people struggle or disengage?
- Share feedback with your team or supervisor so it can inform changes.
- Advocate for adjustments based on lived experience, even when changes feel small.

Front-line observations, when paired with respectful listening, are a powerful tool for improving services and environments.

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Moving Forward, Together: Creating Dementia Supportive Communities the Right Way

3




Guidance for Supervisors and Leaders

Dementia Supportive Communities are strongest when they are shaped **with** people living with dementia and their care partners, not just **for** them. People with lived experience bring unique insight into what feels welcoming, what creates barriers, and what truly makes a difference in daily life.

Leaders play a key role in creating the conditions for meaningful engagement to happen consistently and ethically.

- Create formal and informal opportunities for people living with dementia to share input.
 - Hold focused feedback sessions or listening sessions.
 - Create welcoming spaces where people feel comfortable offering feedback spontaneously, without needing to “sign up” or prepare.
- Involve people living with dementia and care partners in planning, testing, or reviewing programs and spaces.
 - Invite people living with dementia to participate in planning activities.
 - Include people living with dementia in pilot testing or walk-throughs of new spaces, processes, or materials.
- Ensure participation is accessible, supported, and voluntary – not tokenistic.
 - Involve people living with dementia early before decisions are finalized.
 - Seek input on meaningful questions, not just symbolic ones.
 - Keep sessions short, with breaks built in, and allow flexibility to step away if needed.
 - Follow dementia supportive communication principles.
- Act on feedback where possible, and communicate what has changed as a result.

When leaders model inclusive decision-making, it signals that lived experience matters and that feedback leads to real action.

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