

# Visiting a Person with Late Stage Dementia



If your family member or friend is in the late stages of dementia, be prepared for what to expect. Here are six suggestions on how to make your visit meaningful and helpful.

## USE TOUCH

In the later stages of Alzheimer's or another kind of dementia, your person may need a lot of physical care. They might be unable to walk, be incontinent of bowel and bladder or be unable to feed themselves. Whether they are in your own home or a nursing home, they may get touched in relation to those needs for washing, dressing, eating, and more. However, what is important for everyone, but especially for someone who is unable to express their needs, is to receive touch that conveys gentleness and love rather than simply accomplishing the task at hand. So, take time to sit and hold their hand, pat their shoulder, gently brush their hair or give them a hug. They might not be able to demonstrate their appreciation, but it is there, all the same.

## USE NON-VERBAL FACIAL AND BODY EXPRESSIONS

Go ahead and talk with them, telling them about the latest adventures of their grandchildren or their favorite sports team. But while you are doing that, also be mindful of what you are conveying by the expressions on your face and your body stance. Our non-verbal communication (or how we say something) is often just as important as our verbal communication (what we actually say). Smile and make eye contact as much as possible.

## BRING A RELAXING DVD TO WATCH TOGETHER

Does the person with dementia have a favorite show? Maybe it's "I Love Lucy" or "The Lawrence Welk Show". Bring a copy of that and watch it together. It will be a nice way to pass the time and the familiarity of that show may bring comfort to them, even if they do not show much of a response.

## PLAY MUSIC

Choose a recording of older favorite songs and play it while you're there. You can sing along or even leave it so that after you go home, it can continue to be played for them. Music has the possibility of triggering memories and evoking responses, especially meaningful music. You might consider some spiritual songs if your person with dementia is of a certain faith or some ballroom dancing music that dates to when they were young.

## GO OUTSIDE

If you're able and the weather is appropriate, bring them outside for some fresh air. Being outside and getting a little sunshine and outdoor air can brighten anyone's day, and that remains true for someone with advanced dementia as well. A change of scenery can benefit both of you.

## DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

Know before you go to visit your loved one that he might demonstrate a very limited response to your presence. Don't seek for them to recognize you or recall your relationship each time you visit. Remember that it's the disease that is affecting their ability to communicate with you and express appreciation for your visit. If they fall asleep while you're there, understand that fighting dementia is tiring. Take the chance to serve them and express your feelings without expecting anything back.