



This information has been taken from a Blog produced by Encompass (Dorset). Encompass has been supporting individuals with learning disabilities and enduring mental health needs to live fulfilled and empowered lives for over 25 years. Their services are solely in West & North Dorset.

## 5 Ways to Support Someone with Dementia 27<sup>th</sup> Feb 2017

Being diagnosed with dementia can, to some, feel like the beginning of the end. For others it's confirming what they already suspected but never wanted to admit. Whatever their reaction, it will have a profound impact on how they live out the rest of their lives. However whilst many consider the practical elements of living with dementia – specifically living independently – there's the emotional, psychological and social implications to consider as well.



Relationships, social interactions and even how the individual sees themselves in relation to others will change. In addition, the advancement of their condition will make life more challenging.

So what can you do as a carer/someone in their support circle to help them cope with the challenges of dementia?

### 1. Be Positive

It's very easy to focus on what the individual is losing. People experiencing confusion or memory loss often become less confident, suffer low self-esteem and feel less important socially speaking. Making sure the individual feels valued and emphasising that they are still the same person is important.

Their condition may mean less autonomy but on the positive side they get to spend more time with their support circle. Whilst there is no hard evidence to suggest that a positive outlook slows the rate of deterioration, helping the individual to maintain a healthy outlook and an active mind will, at the very least, give them a better standard of living.

### 2. Communication

Over time, individuals with dementia can begin to struggle with remembering words or keeping pace with the conversation, getting lost or losing concentration.

Whilst it's easier to carry on as if there's nothing wrong, it's important to challenge the assumption that acknowledging a difficulty is a negative. Try speaking slower and using simpler sentences. Maintain eye contact with the individual and avoid standing over the person while speaking. To avoid confusion when asking questions, use multiple choice or closed questions as it will make it easier for the individual to answer.

Finally, be aware of how they are communicating with you. Quite often people with dementia will use non-verbal communication to augment speech and devising a series of hand gestures or learning simple sign language can really help.

### 3. Keep them Independent

One of the biggest fears for someone diagnosed with dementia is their loss of independence. Whilst there may come a time when they do need ongoing support, it's important that they remain as independent as possible for as long as possible.

This can be done by encouraging them to maintain as normal a life as possible. Don't rush to take over the day to day tasks as maintaining an active life style and routines is good. What can help is breaking tasks down into manageable chunks so the individual does not become overwhelmed or distracted.

It's also really important to be patient. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing a support circle is restraining ourselves from helping too much. Doing something for our loved one because it's quicker isn't helping. Or at least it's not helping the way they need to be helped. It's like the IT person at work fixing something without taking the time to show you how they fixed it. If the problem happens again you've got no choice but to ask again for help, frustrating both of you.

### 4. Be Compassionate

Conditions like Alzheimer's have the term 'the long goodbye' attached to them because it can take years, even decades for the condition to reach a state of severe deterioration. This means, as a carer or loved one, you are in for a long and rocky road. But this is nowhere close to what the person with dementia is enduring.

Try to understand how they are feeling. If they are confused it isn't their fault and being forgetful isn't just a case of concentrating harder. Do your best to avoid harsh criticism or patronising comments. Don't dismiss their anxieties or roll your eyes because you've heard the same complaint or fear a dozen times before.

What you are going through together is going to be hard and at times sad, so enjoy the here and now and where possible laugh as much as possible.

### 5. Enjoy Yourself

Whilst there may come a point when your family member or loved one can no longer safely go out or even recognise you, it's so important for your sake, as well as theirs, to make the most of the time you do have together. Go out for the day – visit their favourite spots or explore new cities together. Encourage and support them to see friends and family and for friends and family to visit them.. Where possible support them to be as active as possible. Exercise, a healthy diet and cutting out alcohol & smoking are all things that will help slow the dementia's progress. **In short, make as many memories as you can.**