



# Tips for Business Organizations: Creating a Dementia-Friendly Environment

People with dementia may visit your business or service organization and other community settings. At times, they may need extra assistance. Try these communication tips and physical space tips to make your environment dementia friendly.

## Communication Tips for All Business Organizations

*Consider these observations and tips when speaking and interacting with someone who has dementia.*

**Speak clearly and be patient.** Speak clearly, calmly, and slowly to allow the person time to understand information. Use simple short sentences and avoid direct questions. Keep choices to a minimum and don't raise your voice. When possible, use a quiet, non-distracting space/place to talk.

**Listen closely.** Listen carefully to what the person has to say. Give plenty of encouragement as you look for clues about what they may be trying to communicate. If the person finds it difficult to come up with a word, suggest one. But, be careful not to interrupt or finish their sentence. Don't rush. Try to go at their pace.

**Smile warmly and make eye contact.** Someone with dementia may find it difficult to understand what is being said, but may quickly interpret the look on your face, your tone of voice, and your body language. Use a friendly tone and give body cues that respect their personal space.

**Respond to a look of distress.** At times, people with dementia may have forgotten where they live. If someone looks lost and distressed, offer to help by asking if their address is on something in their pocket or bag. When necessary, local police can be of help.

**Help when confusion is present.** The person may seem confused and say something that doesn't make sense to you. Avoid making him or her feel embarrassed or foolish by using your own words for what you think they mean. Try to work through the situation as best you can.

**Watch for signs of change and offer help accordingly. Every day can be different.** For some people with dementia, each day can bring a change in what they can do. How you help someone may differ each time you interact with them.

## Communication Tips for Retail Businesses

*Consider these common practices for someone with dementia in a retail setting.*

**Forgetting to pay.** People with dementia may forget to pay for something they have picked up. Approach the person before they leave the store, ask if they are done shopping for the day, and say you would be happy to help them check out. Guide them to the checkout lane.

**Forgetting and finding items.** A person with dementia may have forgotten what they came in to buy. They may have a list, but have problems finding the items. Offer to help with the list. Help choose the typical amount of an item, particularly if they seem to be buying an unusually large amount.

**Making choices.** While having choices is good, for someone with dementia, too much choice can be confusing. Ask what the person would like and then describe two or three options. Allow him or her time to think and make a decision.

**Handling money.** Counting money, calculating change, recognizing coins and bills, and knowing the value of money can all be difficult for someone with dementia. Offer to help count out the money and be sure to provide a receipt. When appropriate, help someone through the steps of a credit card transaction.

## Creating a Dementia-Friendly Physical Space

*Small changes in a physical space can make a big difference in making an environment feel safe to someone with dementia. A welcoming environment (both indoors and outdoors) helps a person with dementia continue to access everyday activities like shopping, banking or participating in their faith community. There are many best practices you can consider to improve access for people with dementia. Most are relatively low cost and can benefit everyone, including people with dementia.*

**Entrances** should be clearly visible and understood as an entrance. Make sure that glass doors are clearly marked.

**Signage** for finding your way around should be clear, should use bold type, and should have contrast between the words and the background. Also have a contrast between the sign and the mounting surface. Signs should be mounted to the doors or spaces they refer to – not mounted on nearby surfaces. Signs should be at eye level and well-lit. Avoid using highly stylized or abstract images or icons on signage. Think about placing signs at key decision points for someone who is trying to navigate your premises for the first time. Signs for getting to and from public toilets are particularly important.

**Lighting** at entrances should be high powered and include natural light when possible. Avoid pools of bright light and deep shadows.

**Flooring** should be plain, not shiny, and not slippery. Bold patterns on carpets, curtains or wallpaper can cause perceptual problems; plain walls and flooring

are recommended. Keep floor finishes flush rather than stepped; changes to floor surfaces can cause confusion. Pathways should be wide and free of clutter.

**A unisex restroom or changing facility** will allow someone to be assisted without causing them or another user any embarrassment.

**Seating** areas in large spaces, especially areas where people are waiting, can help someone relax before their next task.

**Layout** of an area should be free of clutter and arranged to make it easy to move around. Passageways should be clear and products should be easy to see.

**Quiet** areas for someone who may be feeling anxious or confused can help that person recover enough to independently complete what they were doing.

**ACT on Alzheimer's®**, a statewide, volunteer-driven collaboration preparing Minnesota for the impacts of Alzheimer's, has developed resources to help businesses understand and respond to dementia as an emerging, community-wide issue. Learn more and engage in this work in your community by contacting [info@ACTonALZ.org](mailto:info@ACTonALZ.org).