



MacIntyre

Providing support...your way



***Hot Tips for Supporting People with a  
Learning Disability and Dementia***

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# ***Introduction***

**This Hot Tips booklet is designed to help you and your team with supporting a person who has dementia or is in the early stages of dementia.**

**People with dementia will be affected by changes in behaviour at different stages of their illness. This toolkit will give you practical ideas for situations you might want to prepare for.**

**This booklet is a collection of potential issues that may develop in the home, with suggested solutions, but the ideas can be adapted for other situations, for example a Learning Centre. The possible reasons for these changes are explained to give an insight into how dementia is experienced by people with a learning disability.**

**These suggestions are ideas for you to incorporate in your service where you feel it is appropriate.**

**This is a starting point and you will no doubt develop many more of your own ideas.**

# ***The Environment***



# General Information

## Challenge:

- Unsure about going into a room that they have previously used a lot
- Unsure of where a room is



## Ideas to try:

- **The person's bedroom:** Try putting a photograph of the person when they were younger or a meaningful photograph on their door.
- **Make sure that the colours of the rooms are plain and not too patterned. Have a contrasting colour between the wall and floor, with strong but calming colours. Involve the individual in these choices.**
- **Skirting boards can be painted in a different colour from the walls and floors, to show a clear defined edge.**



- Define edges of stairs with contrasting tape/edging to help people see where to place their feet.
- Close the curtains or blinds when it is dark as reflections from windows at night can be unsettling.
- Turn down the volume on the television or radio before changing the channel to avoid sudden noises. Too much noise can be distressing, although quiet music may be soothing if it is an appropriate style of music for the person.
- Avoid use of mats and rugs.
- Have extra lighting on stairs and in bathrooms.
- Make sure there is a lamp shade on lights and lamps, not just a bare light bulb. In the winter put lamps on before the light fades.







- **Visible Switches:** Aim for a good contrast between the switch and the background. A coloured background will improve visibility of a wall switch.



- **Pictorial signs or objects on the doors of each room** may help to show what the room is. For example a picture of a toilet on the bathroom door.



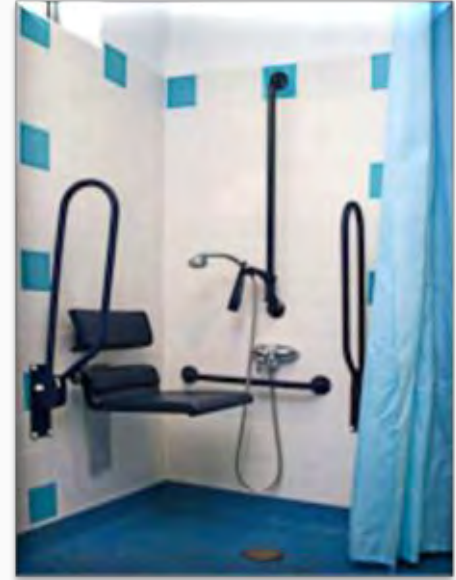
- **Highlight the doors that are important to the person** by using primary colours in a contrasting colour to the wall. Bright colours are easier to see whereas pastel colours can be seen as grey.
- **The person's spatial awareness may be affected.** So to make rooms safer remove any unneeded furniture as the person may not be able to judge the distance between objects.

## Challenge:

- Not wanting to have a shower
- Not using the toilet or bath as confidentially as previously
- Not wanting to go into the bathroom

## Ideas to try:

- Remove or cover the bathroom mirror. People with dementia may not recognise themselves in the mirror so it may appear as if there is an intruder in the room which would scare them.
- Encourage female support workers to wear a skirt instead of trousers. A person with dementia could have difficulty with perception so a person wearing trousers may be seen as a male. This may cause embarrassment and distress for females when intimate care is needed.







- If possible offer a bath instead. If a person has grown up taking a bath rather than showers a shower may be frightening for them.
- Replace shower doors with a curtain. This will allow easier access for the person and for you if they need help.
- To help the person find their way around the bathroom try having a floor that is not patterned, not slippery, not glossy and that is a contrasting colour to the walls.
- A shiny bathroom floor can look like water and a dark floor may look like a hole.
- Put mats around the outside of a shower cubicle.
- Have a shower curtain of one solid colour – not white and avoid patterns.
- Try a coloured suction bath mat inside the bath so that the person can see the bottom of the bath and may not be as scared to get into it.



- **Leave the toilet door open when it is not in use as this will help to remind the person what this room is.**

- **Avoid white toilet seats. Try a contrasting colour to the toilet.**



- **Colour the water in the toilet bowl to help men.**

# *Support*



# Walking

## Challenge:

- Walking back and forth repeatedly
- Leaving the house and walking with no apparent purpose



## Ideas to try:

- Pacing and walking will be for a reason. It is often because the person is looking for something or someone.
- Give the person the chance to go for a walk with their support worker. This way there is a purpose for the walk, such as going to the shops to buy something.
- The person may also want to do something that they used to do a lot before like attend a day centre but they are unable to tell you.



- A safe enclosed path in the garden can provide exercise, an activity and a distraction for the person.
- The pathway could be personalised to the persons previous interests such as flowerbeds.
- Have seating available in the garden for the person to sit and have a rest.
- Avoid plants that have poisonous berries just in case they are eaten.



# Eating and Drinking

## Challenge:

- Being upset at meal times
- Eating from the table and not the plate
- Not wanting to eat food
- Eating very slowly
- The person forgetting they have eaten

## Ideas to try:

- Refer to Speech and Language therapist.
- Try restricting noise, choice and conversation because too many different sounds, smells, movement and things to look at may cause confusion and result in the person becoming distressed.







- Observe the person's body language to see if they have eaten enough, don't like the food or are in pain.
- Have a specific area for eating if this is possible. Try to include the person when preparing the food.
- Soft or liquidised food may be easier for the person to eat.
- Use a plain coloured table cloth or place matt with a different plain coloured plate. This will make the plate easier to see and food more visible on the plate.
- Have some finger food available for snacks between meals.
- Don't rush mealtimes.
- Consider all options and how many people are at the table. Some people may prefer to eat alone or with only 1 or 2 others.
- Food needs to be appropriate for the person especially if they have short term memory loss rather than long term memory loss. The person may not have eaten certain foods when they were younger so may not recognise them now.



- Some appliances, such as microwaves and toasters, may not be recognised by the person.
- The person may want to drink out of a cup rather than a mug, if this is what they did when they were younger.
- Doors may be removed from cupboards or labelled with pictures or signs to show what is inside.
- Clear information about what is in the cupboards will make it easier for the person to find things and supports their independence.
- Open shelves could be used instead of cupboards.
- Make sure out of date food is thrown away.



# Night Time

## Challenge:

- Waking up during the night and wandering around the house
- Not wanting to go to bed



## Ideas to try:

- Use a different coloured bottom sheet to the top sheet/quilt cover. Different colours on the bed will help the person to know how to get into bed.
- Rearrange the furniture so there is a clear walking space around the room and to the door. Be careful of making the environment unfamiliar.
- As in the bathroom cover or take the mirrors away as the person may not recognise themselves in the mirror and think there is an intruder, which will scare them.



- Use soft lighting to guide the person to the toilet.
- Leave a light on in the hall and toilet.
- Sensor lights could be used that come on automatically when someone gets up however, they may be alarming for some people.
- In the bedroom and living room have the volume on the television at a suitable level so to reduce the impact on other people who live in the house. It may also reduce agitation caused by too much noise.
- A main exit can be painted in the same colour as the walls on the inside to try to discourage the person from leaving the house.



# Communication



# ***Facilitating Good Communication***

- Use the 10 facilitation skills.
- Find a quiet and calming place to talk.
- Use their name, touch their arm if appropriate, reduce distractions and make sure you have good lighting.
- Identify yourself and use the person's name.
- Work out when the person is most able to concentrate and understand you.  
In these periods communicate important things.
- Use visual cues, wherever possible.
- Give lots of reminders when you are giving information.
- Encourage the person to talk about their past.



# *Life Stories*



## ***Suggestions of what to include in life story work***

- **Good times**
- **Achievements**
- **Important people, now and in the past**
- **Hobbies, now and in the past**
- **Places stayed in**
- **Holidays**
- **Relationships**
- **Favourite songs**
- **Beliefs**
- **Likes and dislikes**
- **Hopes and wishes**
- **Favourite sayings**
- **Scrap book**

**Use a life story box as well as a life story book. Include a variety of things like:**

- **Pictures**
- **Photographs**
- **Music tapes, CD's and records**
- **Ornaments**
- **Toys**
- **Dolls/furry animals**
- **Fabrics**
- **Things that have special smells**
- **Things that have special meaning to the person**



# What is out there



**E Learning Modules**

**Dementia Noticeboard**



**Email: [dsig@macintyrecharity.org](mailto:dsig@macintyrecharity.org)**

# Booklets

- **What is Dementia – MacIntyre**
- **Person Centred Dementia Care by Dawn Brooker**
- **Alzheimer's Society Guide to the Dementia Care Environment – by Jackie Pool**
- **Dementia and People with Learning Disabilities from The British Psychological Society**
- **Learning Disability and Dementia: A Training Guide for Staff Edited by Diana Kerr and Claire Wilson**



# Videos/DVD's

- **Gold. Growing Older with Learning Disabilities. The Video**  
– From the foundation for People with Learning Disabilities
- **Down's Syndrome and Dementia. Philosophy of Care**  
– From Down's Syndrome Association
- **Down's Syndrome and Dementia. Fighting for Andrew**  
– From Down's Syndrome Association
- **Iris** – featuring Judi Dench, Jim Broadbent and Kate Winslet
- **Featherhead** – From Alzheimer's Society





# Websites



• [www.downs-syndrome.org.uk](http://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk)



• [www.dsscotland.org.uk](http://www.dsscotland.org.uk)



• [www.hftsmarthouse.org.uk](http://www.hftsmarthouse.org.uk)



• [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)



• [www.debramooreassociates.com](http://www.debramooreassociates.com)



• [www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org)



• [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk)



• [www.bild.org](http://www.bild.org)



• [www.arcuk.org.uk](http://www.arcuk.org.uk)



• [www.ndti.org.uk](http://www.ndti.org.uk)



• [www.booksbeyondwords.co.uk](http://www.booksbeyondwords.co.uk)

# ***Conclusion***



- **Keep the environment calm, consistent, obvious, familiar and safe.**
- **Any changes to the living environment need to suit the person with minimal disruption to others living in the same environment.**
- **If a lot of changes happen quickly it can lead to an increase in confusion of the person with dementia, which can often be perceived as a progression in dementia.**
- **There is always a reason for a person behaving in a certain way. Try to find out the reason and the trigger.**
- **Keep trying and retrying ideas. What doesn't work the first time may work the next time you try it. Reflect on the ideas you try to learn and adapt your practices.**
- **Allow an element of independence to allow control over activities and actions for as long as possible.**



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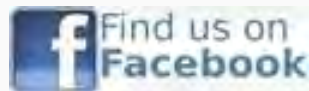
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