



Hints and Tips To make your group dementia friendly

Why have dementia friendly community groups?

People are living longer. By 2029 it is estimated that 40% of the population will be over the age of 50. It is estimated that one in five people over the age of 65 will have dementia.

In 2014 there are approximate 88,000 people in Scotland with dementia.

Most people who have mild to moderate dementia are living at home. They may be living on their own or with their partner. They are leading active lives. They are part of their community.

"Just because I have dementia doesn't mean that I don't like going out."

"I enjoy meeting new people."

"I have my gym buddies."

"We both go to the coffee morning at the church. I see my friends and Jim meets up with people who have known him for years. They chat about things that he is interested in. He really enjoys himself. We have things to talk about when we get home later."

Hints and tips to make your group dementia friendly

We have written these hints and tips to help your group become more dementia friendly. They are things that people have told us have helped them.

Most of them are common sense. Most of them are just good 'people skills'.

The tips will help everyone who comes to your group not just people who have dementia.

"Lots of older people forget things even when we don't have dementia."

"I don't want to have to tell everyone that I have dementia. Why should I? I might just have some memory problems."



How does dementia affect people?

There are many forms of dementia. It affects everyone differently. It starts off with very mild symptoms and gets worse over time. People often find that some days are better than others.

People with dementia can have difficulty with:

- Remembering what they are doing.
- Speaking and finding the right word.
- Remembering names and faces.
- Understanding instructions.
- Getting around in confusing environments.

How other people respond to people who are having these kinds of problems makes the biggest difference.

"I feel a nuisance – they haven't said anything but it just feels as if they don't want me."

"I don't always remember the rules."

"I don't think they know anything about dementia – they aren't very helpful."

Making people feel welcome

Feeling welcome is a good starting point for all of us when we go somewhere. You want people to feel welcome the first time they come to your group and then each time they come along.

Our tips

- Welcome people when they arrive.
- Wear badges that remind people who you are. Make it easy for people to know who can help them.
- Smile warmly and make eye contact.
- Use a friendly tone, speak clearly and slowly – it allows people time to understand what is being said.
- Listen carefully to what they say and give plenty of encouragement.
- Have the room set out in a welcoming way. Make it easy to get around.
- Keep things the same. Change can be confusing.
- Have somewhere people can sit that is quieter if they need a break.
- Keep in touch with everyone who comes to your group.

"It is noisy and everything looks so unfamiliar."

"I forget people's faces and names. It is embarrassing – I don't like going."

"They make me feel really welcome even if I've missed some weeks."

"Mary is really nice. She always comes over to me when I come. She doesn't rush me. She helps me find a chair. She listens to me even if I'm struggling to find the right words."

"We contacted Alzheimer Scotland – they sent someone round to talk to us about dementia. She told us what things we could do to help our members. We feel much more confident now. It is much more straightforward than we thought."



Joining in

People with dementia go to community groups for the same reasons as everyone else:

- Meet up with friends.
- Take part in activities that interest them.
- Learn new skills or start new hobbies.
- Be involved in their community.

"We can still do lots of things. I have taken up computing and gained certificates in first aid."

These are some of the things people with dementia find more difficult:

- Remembering what they are doing.
- Understanding instructions.
- Handling money.
- Hearing when there is a lot of background noise.

Our tips

- Allow people time to remember what they are doing.
- Look out for clues of what people are trying to say – suggest a word but don't interrupt or finish their sentence.
- If it is noisy the person might not hear what is being said. Find somewhere that is quieter with less background noise.
- Be patient - people with dementia can still pick up on body language and facial expressions.
- Some people just want to watch. You can encourage people to join in but don't press too much.
- Encourage people to join in each day. Last week might have been a time they wanted to be quiet but they may feel differently today.
- Have someone who knows their role is to look out for someone with dementia and make sure they are ok.

"When I'm at the camera club it all starts to come back – I can show others how to take good pictures."

"Sometimes I can't work out what money to give. The person doing the teas and coffees helps me."

"I have my dance buddies. We have great fun. We all get it wrong sometimes."

"I get embarrassed when I can't remember things. June is great. She spots when I'm struggling. She doesn't take over, she just gives me a wee hand until I've remembered what to do."

"Alan is great. He comes over to me to find out if I need help."

Getting to the group

People with dementia sometimes stop going to a group because they find it difficult getting there. They forget the route, they can't manage on the bus, or they can't drive any more.

"John's friends come for him each week. They walk to the bowling club together."

"Mary popped in one day and said she would come for me each week and walk with me to the church coffee morning."

It can be confusing inside buildings. People with dementia can forget how to get to the room where the group meets. Doors and corridors in places like community centres and old schools can all look the same.

Our tips

- Offer people a lift or company to get to the group.
- Have clear, easy to read signs. Put them on the doors - not on the wall.
- Make sure the corridors and rooms are well lit.
- Get something distinctive and mark the way to your group.
- Ask people what would help them get to the group.



"All the doors in the toilets looked the same to me. I couldn't find my way out."

"We have a large plant pot outside the door of our room. People can see it from the other end of the corridor."

"We walked around the building with a group of our members to find out what things would help."

Committee meetings

People with dementia can still contribute to running the group. For example, at the Scottish Dementia Working Group – which is a collective voice for people with dementia, and whose members speak at conferences and the like – all the members have dementia.

Our tips

- Send the agenda and other information out in plenty of time.
- If there are several different items put them each on different coloured paper. It is easier for people to find the 'pink paper' than 'Item number 5'.
- Pace the meetings. Slow down the pace of discussion to give people time to say what they want to say.
- Have short meetings. Have breaks and refreshments.

"I have been involved in this group for years. I may have dementia now but I can still contribute."

"I have been on lots of committees. I forget some things but I have my notes to remind me of what I want to say."

"We get an easy to understand agenda before the committee meeting. We have time to prepare and write down our thoughts."

"Tom phones me up to remind me of the meeting. He phones the day before to agree what time he'll come for me. We go together. He writes up the dates of the next meetings on my calendar."

"I get tired and find it difficult to concentrate after a while. We stop for breaks. That helps."

More information

Alzheimer Scotland provides information about dementia. They can provide training and awareness sessions. They have local offices and support groups.

www.alzscot.org

The **Become a Dementia Friend** website has short videos about dementia.

www.dementiafriendsscotland.org

Dementia friendly communities - this website has information for shops and other businesses about becoming dementia friendly. Some of their suggestions are useful for community groups.

www.alzscot.org/dementia_friendly_communities

About Wisdom in Practice

Wisdom in Practice is a project which supports and promotes the development of services and other activities led by older people. It is funded by the Scottish Government through the Equalities Programme and is run by Outside the Box.

There is a range of resources for groups, including publications, how to guides, events and development support for individual groups and projects.

This is one of a series of Hints and Tips for services and other activities led by older people. Other hints and tips include Hearing Loss Friendly groups, Getting Started, Getting Organised, and Finding the Funds.

Wisdom in Practice has its own website www.wisdominpractice.org.uk



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