

DEMENTIA AWARENESS

A short 'how to' guide for supporting parishioners living with dementia, their carers and loved ones.

Attending Mass

- Discuss with the person and their caregivers to understand their current capabilities and desire to attend Mass.
- Consider and ask if the person is still able to attend Mass with some help or transport – it's all too easy to assume that this is no longer possible.
- Could you allocate a dedicated person accompany them to Mass, offering assistance and companionship throughout the service?

- Remember to introduce yourself with a badge or symbol which shows your role – otherwise you could easily be mistaken for someone else or someone who is interfering with their time with God.
- If navigating the aisle is challenging, arrange for Communion to be brought to their seat.



- Speak slowly and especially during greetings and interactions – a person with dementia may need much more time the amount of time to understand.
- Invite them to participate in ways they are comfortable with, whether it's singing, praying, or simply being present.

For additional information and online training resources visit

www.catholicsafeguarding.org.uk

Visiting someone at home or to a care setting

Greetings: Don't assume that everyone would like to be called by their first name. Addressing someone by their surname might restore a sense of dignity and respect that might otherwise be lost. This avoids the temptation to 'talk down' to someone. Remember that you might be mistaken for someone who has had contact with them.

Physical Approach: As dementia advances, people may begin to lose their sense of spatial awareness. Try not to approach someone from behind but from the front so that they are not taken aback. Perhaps you are not wanted today? Use your judgement – it might be that rather than leaving the room you could sit down for a while in a way that is non-invasive and gradually make a connection.

Working with emotions: As dementia advances, someone can feel a range of emotions which can change very quickly. If someone is feeling sad or upset, acknowledge this and try to understand their concerns rather than carrying on.

Personal Space: Make sure you give the person plenty of personal space. Sitting too near someone may feel uncomfortable for them. Try to sit at an angle if possible. You will soon be able to judge what feels right in terms of space.

Touch awareness: Be aware that over-familiarity may remind someone of an earlier abusive experience. Remember to follow safe touch policies.

Avoid too many questions: Answering too many questions can be difficult for some as cognitive processing becomes harder. Questions which require a 'yes' or a no' are sometimes easier to deal with.

Go with the person in their journey: You may see situations from many different perspectives or believe that it is Monday when it is in fact Sunday. Try not to contradict as this might cause distress – gently move onto another subject.

Reframe if needed: If someone is upset or distressed about something, you can use what are known as distraction techniques. Gently steer the person away from their immediate distress with another idea. For example: 'I know that you are upset about this – shall we go the lounge and have a cup of tea together?'

Visiting someone with dementia as an EMHC

+ **Discuss with the person and their caregivers to understand their current capabilities and desire to receive the Eucharist.**

+ **Pick a time when the person is usually most alert and comfortable. Early morning or late evening might not be ideal.**

+ **Ensure that any readings are simple and easy to understand.**

+ **Make a space for personal prayer after the Gospel reading so that family and loved ones can be remembered in prayer.**

+ **Remember to bring the parish newsletter or bulletin with you to keep the person you are visiting in touch with the parish community.**



THANK YOU

WE ALL WANT TO MAKE
A POSITIVE IMPACT IN
THE LIVES OF PEOPLE
LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

Listed below are a small selection of national resources you might find useful in your ministry.

1. Alzheimer's Society: a charity which provide dementia teaching resources to help educate people about dementia during Dementia Action Week _ (alzheimers.org.uk)
2. Dementia UK: They offer a variety of dementia leaflets, including tips for better communication, considering a care home for a person with dementia, and more at [Home - Dementia UK](http://Home-DementiaUK)
3. Alzheimer's Government Resources: A dedicated government website which provides resources for people with Alzheimer's Disease and related conditions. Their address is [Dementia: applying All Our Health - GOV.UK](http://Dementia:applyingAllOurHealth-GOV.UK) (www.gov.uk)

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