

Libraries are respected community institutions and vital to a dementia friendly community because they provide access to resources, services, and programs for people living with dementia and their families.



What is Dementia?

Dementia is a general term for a loss of memory and other thinking abilities that is serious enough to interfere with activities of daily life. Dementia has many causes. Alzheimer's disease, the most common cause of dementia, is a disease of the brain that leads to problems with memory, thinking, and behavior. Alzheimer's and other dementias are not a normal part of aging.

Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life
- Challenges in planning or solving problems
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure
- Confusion with time or place
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
- New problems with words in speaking or writing
- Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps
- Decreased or poor judgment
- Withdrawal from work or social activities
- Changes in mood and personality

Interacting with People with Dementia

- Speak clearly and be patient
- Listen closely
- Smile warmly and make eye contact
- Respond to a look of distress
- Help when confusion is present
- Watch for signs of change and offer help accordingly – every day can be different

Taking Action in the Library

- Train staff and volunteers on becoming Dementia Friends, which will help them learn about dementia and the small things they can do to make a difference both within and outside of the library.
- Train staff on programs that offer opportunities for meaningful engagement or work with community partners to bring music, art, or poetry programming to the library.
- Offer library materials helpful for caregivers of people with dementia, but also materials that can engage and stimulate people living with the disease, including:
 - Both adult and children's collections
 - Nonfiction books on an array of topics
 - Short fiction (such as folktales, myths, and excerpts from full length books) and poetry
 - Books that are highly illustrated with color photographs. Popular subjects can include animals, flowers, fashion, countries, old cars, etc.
 - Books for reading aloud. The text should be short and have a simple story line.
 - Local history and biographies of famous persons written in an easy-to-understand style/format.
 - Audio books in both CD and downloadable format (e.g., OneClickDigital or OverDrive)
 - Magazines in both paper and downloadable format (e.g., zinio)
 - Music in both CD and downloadable format (e.g., freegal)
 - Videos in both DVD and downloadable format (e.g., indieflix or OverDrive)
- Make sure that the needs and interests of all ethnic and cultural communities are considered when planning how you will serve persons with dementia. This means selecting library materials that reflect the history and experience of diverse groups and having a variety of media available to accommodate language barriers.
- Offer individual appointments to the person and their care partner to help them choose materials that interest them. Keep their current abilities in mind and be respectful of their dignity and personhood.
- Display Alzheimer's-disease-related books for people living with dementia, family caregivers and youth during National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month and National Family Caregiver Month (November).
- Create memory boxes or reminiscence kits for patrons to check out. The boxes or kits are theme defined and may contain childhood toys, board games, crafts from previous decades and local memorabilia.
- Have a take-home resource bag of materials appropriate for people living with dementia and for family caregivers. The bag for someone living with dementia may include adult or children's non-fiction books on a themed topic with colorful photographs, activity books, music CD and exercise DVD. The bag for family caregivers may include books to support and educate the family caregiver, a relaxation CD, and educational DVD on the disease.

Hosting Programs in the Library

- Be a site for educational programs on dementia, Alzheimer's disease and brain health.
- Offer educational programming for persons who are caregivers of those with dementia.
- Be a site for support groups for people living with dementia and family caregivers.
- Organize and offer a book club or create a book club kit. Include an Alzheimer's-disease-related book, study group questions and a flyer listing community resources.
- Consider hosting a Memory Café at the library.

Taking Library Services and Materials to the Community

- Offer to bring programs using library materials to senior living communities and adult day settings in your area. One example of such a program is the “Tales and Travel Memories” program, which is an imaginary excursion to a destination around the globe. The program takes participants with early- and mid-stage dementia on an “excursion,” using readings, folk tales, pictures, and music resources to immerse them in the place. Learn more: <http://talesandtravelmemories.com>
- Offer a one-person “bookmobile” and take a selection of books to senior living communities.
- Provide a read-a-loud program in congregate living and adult day settings.
- Deliver library materials carefully chosen to meet their interests and abilities to homebound patrons.
- Offer a mobile library service.

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 your library. 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.
- 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. Pathways should be wide and free of clutter.
- A family/unisex restroom will allow someone to be assisted without causing embarrassment to them or another user.

References

Know the 10 Warning Signs

www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_know_the_10_signs.asp

Visit the Alzheimer’s and Related Dementia’s Interest Group (IGARD), Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA), American Library Association (ALA) website for more information about providing library services to people living with dementia

www.ala.org/ascla/interestgroups/igard

Libraries are just one important part of the community.
Working alongside other sectors can help the whole community
become more dementia friendly. Learn more at dfamerica.org.

