

Dementia friendly hints and tips

People with dementia may use your organisation on a regular or infrequent basis. Sometimes they may need extra assistance. Here are some simple tips that will help make your business dementia friendly.

1. Speak clearly

Speak clearly, calmly and slowly to allow the person time to understand information. Use simple short sentences, don't overload them with complex instructions. If possible talk in a distraction free office space or quiet corner. For people with dementia word finding can be difficult. You could suggest a word but be careful not to interrupt or finish the sentence for them.

2. Body language

People with dementia can respond negatively to body language. Smile warmly, make eye contact, make sure you are at the person's level, use a friendly tone and respect their personal space.

3. Listen

Listen carefully to what they have to say, give plenty of encouragement, while looking for clues as to what they may be trying to communicate.

4. Respect and patience

Change what you are trying to communicate if they do not understand. Allow them time to express what they want to tell you. Don't rush them, and try to go at their pace. You might need to find a quiet space to give them more time and not hold up other customers.

5. Noise

Other age related problems such as hearing and visual deficits may also be an issue therefore they may struggle to understand if there are a lot of different noises around them. Reduce unnecessary noise or move to a quiet office or space.

6. Handling money

Calculating and handling coins and banknotes can be difficult. Offer to help by counting out money, help with filling in payment slips and give receipts where possible.

7. Finding the way

People with dementia may forget where things are, have problems recognizing everyday objects and often need your help to find their way around. They may not always be able to follow simple directions and need you to guide them or show them what to do next.

8. Feeling lost

They may become lost in familiar places or forget where they live. They may come into an organisation as the place looks familiar, and has familiar staff, even if they are not intending to use it. If they seem lost or distressed, offer to help by asking if their address is on something they might have in their pocket wallet or handbag. Alternatively, they may have contact details for their carer. If necessary the police can help.

9. Making choices

People with dementia may forget why they have gone into your organisation. Offer to help by making some suggestions, but don't offer too many choices at one time, as this could lead to more confusion.

10. Whose reality

Sometimes they may say things that don't make sense. Avoid making the person feel embarrassed by contradicting them. This is their reality and should be respected.

11. Consistency

If a familiar setting has been rearranged or a new staff member is present it may confuse them. Try to keep things the same or offer more assistance if things have changed. Regular customers do well if the same staff member deals with them, even if it seems they don't remember them or what business transactions they made on their last visit.

12. Every day can be different

For some people with dementia, what they are able to do changes from day to day, or even at times of day, so how you help them may need to be adapted each time they visit.