

# Creating a calming environment

THE ENVIRONMENT AND DEMENTIA

This Help Sheet suggests ways to create a calming atmosphere in the home of a person with dementia. Not all suggestions will suit all people or situations, but some people will find a solution to a particular problem they are experiencing in the home.

Creating a soothing comforting atmosphere for a person with dementia can have many benefits for the person as well as their family and carers. A calming environment can:

- Maintain familiarity with a predictable routine
- Minimise confusion by reducing choices, clutter, noise and glare
- Help the person with dementia to concentrate and rest
- Provide some meaningful activity

A number of things in the home may disturb some people with dementia. These include:

- Confusing patterns on carpet and furnishings
- Becoming disoriented by shadows and glare
- Feeling disturbed by television
- Becoming agitated by loud or competing noises
- Getting confused by changes to the environment
- Losing the way and not being able to find things

## What to try

### Routine

Keep the same routine and the same positions for things in the house.

Help the person with dementia prepare for changes to their environment or routine,

activities and events. Talk about them in advance and make a reminder sign about what is happening today. Also use a daily diary and calendar.

### Noise

Limit distractions and control noise. Try to have no more than one source of sound at a time and no competing noises when having a conversation. If necessary, limit the number of visitors and simultaneous conversations.

Turn the TV off or screen programs carefully. Avoid switching channels. Turn the radio off if necessary. Some people, however, prefer to have the low level background noise of the TV or radio because it is familiar.

Turn the volume down of the telephone ringing or use an answer machine if necessary.

Some people find earplugs helpful in reducing noise levels especially in busy, noisy places such as shopping centres.

Provide soft enjoyable background music, favourite or familiar songs, or soothing music.

Try nature videos of rainforest, garden, and the ocean.

Singing can have a significant calming effect on some people. Try singing the person's favourite songs and also try lullabies for soothing. A number of cassettes and CDs of lullabies are available.

## Lighting and mirrors

Eliminate shadows, glare and reflections in the house, which may be confusing or frightening.

## Pets

Pets are a very important source of comfort and relaxation for many people with dementia.

## Therapies and activities

Soothing strategies include:

- Aromatherapy
- Hand, scalp and foot massage
- Bath with lavender oil
- Spa

If there is a spare room in the house make it into a quiet room with a comfortable chair and any items which particularly help the person with dementia to relax, such as music, pot plants, aromatherapy. This could be a retreat if they become agitated.

Recreational activities have a very calming effect on some people. Any one of the following may be appropriate:

- Walking
- Exercise bike
- Fishing
- Music activities like singing in a choir, playing the piano or organ
- Outdoors activities like hosing, gardening or sitting in the garden
- Visits to peaceful places like parks, bush and beach
- Household tasks such as washing up, folding washing
- Looking at books or being read to
- Painting, pottery or fiddling with activity boxes

Alzheimer's Australia has a number of books for sale which have activities and games for people with dementia, as well as the

Nostalgia Collection of cue cards with photos and information to prompt memories and discussion.

## Sleeping

Sleep-inducing strategies include:

- Soothing music
- Warmed bed
- Night light to help person recognise where they are when they wake up
- Reduced caffeine
- Relaxing herbal teas
- Reducing sweet foods before bedtime

## Décor

The following decorating approaches may be helpful in reducing confusion:

- Plain colours not patterns
- Contrasting colours to help person see where the floor finishes and the wall starts
- Use of strong but calming colours - avoiding pale colours which may be hard to see and very bright colours which may be overstimulating

### Further Information

Alzheimer's Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**.

For further information and to view other Help Sheets visit our website at [www.alzheimers.org.au](http://www.alzheimers.org.au)