



# Communications Training Customer Facing Staff





## Who this will help

- Business owners and managers
- Eldercare professionals
- Customer facing staff
- Caregivers
- Family & friends



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## How this will help



- You can't identify someone with dementia by looking at them.
- Most people with dementia are over 65, but, in the case of Early Onset Alzheimer's disease, some could be as young as 40.
- Everyone experiences dementia in different ways. What is a problematic area for one person, may not be for another, and visa-versa.



In your line of work, many of your customers may already have dementia, and as the population ages, many more of your customers may develop dementia, and will want to carry on using your business.



## Recognizing the Signs

- The signs of dementia that you'd notice will be different from someone who spends everyday with someone with dementia.
- Learn the signs of dementia. Likely you would notice a customer doing or saying something out of place that may suggest they are having a problem that might be associated with dementia.



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## Common Indications

- Looking or saying that they are lost or confused.
- Noticeably searching for something they can't find.
- Appearing as though they are unsure of what to do next.
- Difficulties handling or understanding their money, or how to use their card.



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## Common Indications

- Struggling with self-service facilities.
- Their speech might be hard to understand.
- Trouble understanding what you are saying.
- Forgetting to pay for things they have picked up.



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There may be all sorts of reasons why people might be having these problems that have nothing to do with dementia or memory problems.

There are many conditions where people can exhibit signs similar to dementia such as forgetfulness or memory problems. It is best not to assume that someone has dementia just because some of the symptoms are present. Strokes, depression, alcoholism, infections, hormone disorders, nutritional deficiencies and brain tumors can all cause dementia-like symptoms.

Please keep in mind that not everyone who has these difficulties has dementia. If a customer is observed to be showing these signs, it is important to follow your company's internal policies and procedures.

**Ensure your customer and you are supported during the interaction.**

Remember, it is not our jobs to diagnose, however it is our jobs to be helpful and courteous.



## Communication Tips

- Kindness, common sense, avoiding stress, using good communication skills and a smile go a very long way.
- How you choose to communicate with someone exhibiting symptoms of dementia will shape your interaction.
- Responding with warmth, compassion and understanding can diffuse a confusing or aggravated situation.



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Losing the ability to communicate can be one of the most frustrating problems for people with dementia, and can add to the difficulty of maintaining friendships. Remember that people with dementia retain their feelings and emotions even though they may not understand what is being said, so it is important to always maintain their dignity and self esteem.

**Kindness, common sense using good communication skills and a smile go a very long way.**



## Dos & Don'ts

- Be patient and respectful
- Approach from the front
- Be aware of your body language
- Choose your words
- Maintain eye contact



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**Be patient & respectful** A little extra time is sometimes all it takes whether that time is needed for comprehension, counting money or making a decision. Don't rush or make them feel as though they are holding you up. Never treat the adult as though they were a child. Don't be condescending. Help them, don't take over for them.

**Approach from the front**, never come up behind someone with dementia.

**Be aware of your body language** - 55% of communications comes from stance, gestures and facial expressions. Smile, and never cover your mouth or face while communicating.

**Choose your words.** the words you choose should be clear and in simple sentences. Speak slowly. Allow time for your words to be understood. Use "can" phrases rather than "can't" phrases. **Maintain eye contact** to keep them focused in the moment





## Dos & Don'ts

- Watch your tone
- Use visual clues
- Live in their world
- Offer reassurance & validation
- Avoid stress



**Watch your tone** - The tone and pitch of voice will be comprehended before words. Genuine, calm tone will bring about better outcomes. Similarly, read their emotion, body language and tone of voice rather than the words used. Touch their hand or arm if it is appropriate, to convey reassurance.

**Use visual clues when possible.** Point to specific objects or use pictures on a chart or menu to help communicate and aid in their decision making.

**Live in their world.** A person with dementia's perception is their reality. If possible be 'in the moment' and connect with the person by acknowledging their concerns.

**Offer reassurance and validation.** They may not understand or remember who you are or what your role is, remind them you are here to help. Repetition could indicate increased stress or fear. **Avoid Stressors** – this goes for both of you. Just as you can read their face and body language to see if they are getting upset, they can tell if you are getting frustrated and this could escalate a situation. If you do end up in a stressful conversation, try to change the subject. Ask them to tell you about something they are interested in. Reminiscence and diversion may help calm someone down and establish feelings of control. It can help someone to tell you about who they are and assist with distracting them from their current focus.



## Specific Examples





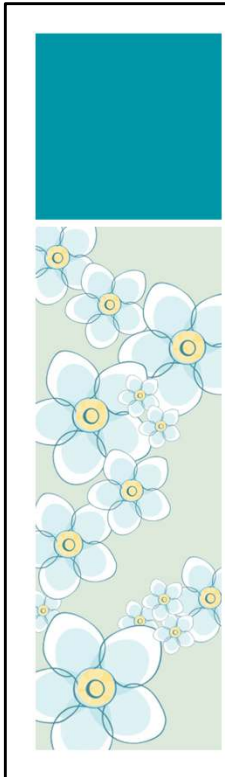
## Scenario #1

- You are at your local pharmacy and you notice an older woman wandering up and down the aisles, her cart filled with dozens of the same item. She is looking around a lot, appearing lost and confused.
- What are some things you could do to help?




### Customer appears lost or confused

- Approach them in a friendly open manner, from the front looking at them and making eye contact
- Ask “can I help?”
- Get them to tell you a story about how they got to be where they are
- Avoid calling to them from a distance.
- Avoid approaching from behind



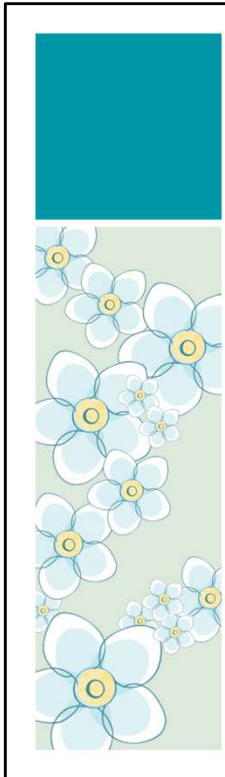
## Scenario #2

- You are working with an older customer who is trying to pay an outstanding bill. He came in with his checkbook but as you gave him the final total, he became confused. He's now taken out his wallet as well and is thumbing through its contents. He keeps asking for the total over and over and is becoming frustrated.
- What are some things you can do to help him?




### Customer has trouble with money or payment

- Approach them in a friendly open manner, from the front looking at them and making eye contact
- Ask “can I help?”
- Reassure them that it is OK to take their time – there’s no hurry. Do not show signs of impatience.
- Offer to assist with making out the check. Do not take over, however, do it with them.



## Scenario #3



- You are in the self-checkout line at the local supermarket. In front of you is a woman who is struggling with the scanner device. She is cursing loudly while scanning the same item over and over while the machine is repeating the same directions to her, to put her item onto the belt.
- What are some ways you can help to diffuse this situation?



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Someone is having trouble with self-service or automated system

- Approach them in a friendly open manner
- Ask “can I help?”
- Reassure them that it is OK to take their time – there’s no hurry. Do not show signs of impatience.
- Offer to help or to show them how to do it. Do not take over, however, do it with them, unless they ask.
- Try to keep it light – “I always have trouble with these machines as well”
- Offer to bring the women to a full service lane.



## Scenario #4

- Mark is a regular customer. He's told you before that he has Mild Cognitive Impairment, but you have never really noticed any symptoms before. Today, however, after having some difficulty filling out a form, Mark became difficult to understand. He seemed confused about what he was doing, rambling and almost incoherent at times.
- What are some things you could have done to help the situation?



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### **Customer is hard to understand**

Those with dementia may develop speech problems that escalate if they feel stressed or rushed.

Encourage him to take his time; Remind him you are there to help

Listen very carefully. Show him that you are focused on what he is saying

Watch his body language



Repeat what you think he may be trying to say

Ask him to write it down

Try to change the subject if he becomes agitated.


Try to identify the trigger of the stress and 'remove' it

Focus on feelings, not facts



## Scenario #5

- It is a busy Saturday at work. There are many different things going on, customers asking questions, a delivery person has arrived, a family waiting in line has several noisy children. You are assisting Diana with a transaction but it seems she cannot understand what you are saying to her and what she needs to do next.
- What are some things you could do if your customer is having difficulty understanding you?



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### **Customer is having difficulty understanding you**

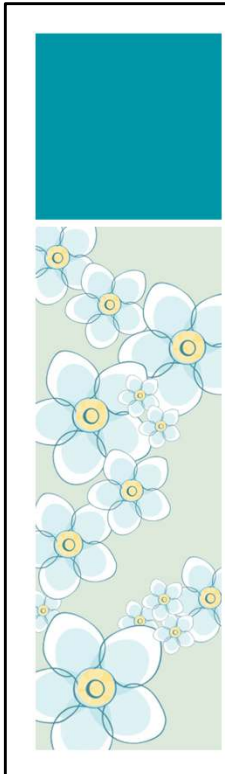
Hearing problems and other comprehension issues can complicate conversation for someone with dementia, especially if they feel hurried, or if there is background noise.

Take your time and make only one point at a time

Speak slowly and clearly. Say things as simply as possible


Use good eye contact

Use sign language, body language and gestures to reinforce what you are saying



## Scenario #6

- You work at a local department store. You see John in all the time. Today, however, John has left the building without paying for his items.
- How should you respond?



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### **Customer forgets to pay**

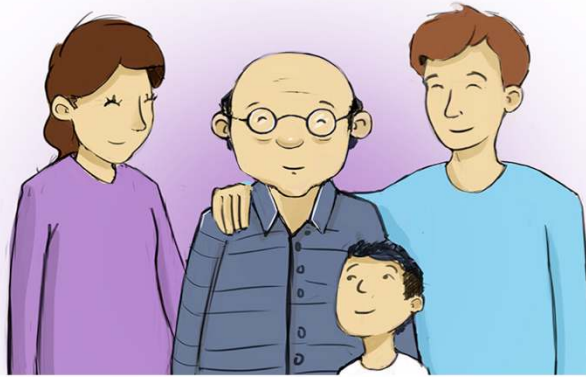
This is difficult. While someone may have forgotten to pay, they might equally be engaged in theft, and your safety is the most important thing.

If you know the person, and you know that they have dementia, then you can simply ask if you can help, and if they would like to pay. This will often be all you need to do.

Rarely, people with dementia will not understand that they need to pay, or may feel that they shouldn't. In these cases, it is up to the discretion of the manager.

If you do not know the person, then your business's usual policy on theft should apply.





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