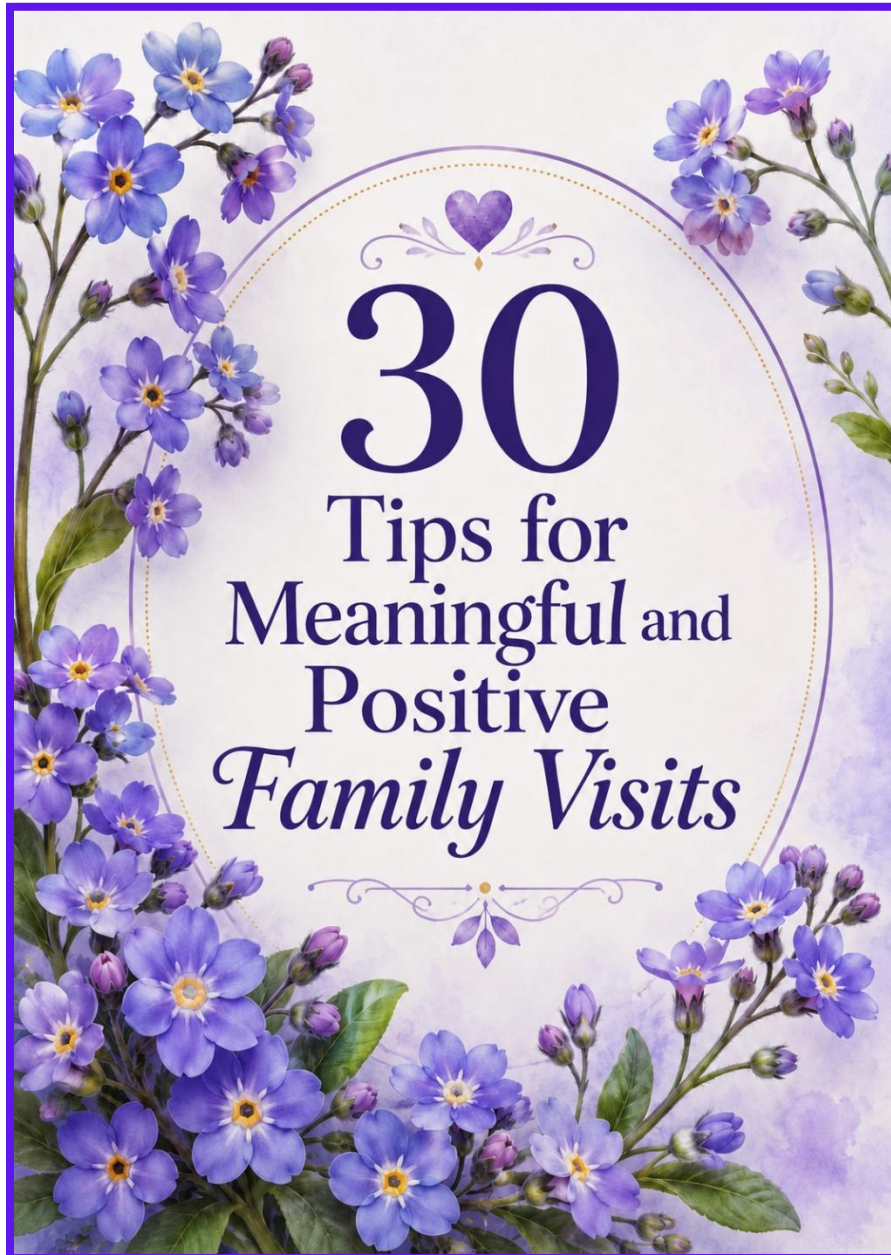


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A Note for Visitors

These tips and ideas are intended to help you create meaningful, positive, and comfortable visits with a loved one living with dementia.

As you use them, please remember: your loved one is an adult with a lifetime of experiences, relationships, knowledge, and dignity. Dementia may affect memory, communication, or understanding, but it does not diminish who they are or their right to be treated with respect.

Suggestions such as using simple language, offering limited choices, or engaging the senses are not about treating someone like a child. They are ways to reduce confusion, support comfort, and make connection easier.

Avoid condescending tones, childish language, or interactions that may feel dismissive. Instead, focus on warmth, patience, and genuine connection.

Listen, acknowledge feelings, respect choices whenever possible, and meet the person where they are in the moment.

The goal is to help your loved one feel valued, understood, and respected throughout every visit.



1. Plan Ahead

Tip: Coordinate your visit with the facility staff to ensure your loved one is in a good mood and receptive to visitors. Choose a time when they are most alert and comfortable.

Talk to the staff to learn about your loved one's daily routine. For instance, if they're typically more alert in the morning after breakfast, plan your visit during that time. If they tend to nap in the afternoon, it might be best to visit earlier in the day. By aligning your visit with their most receptive times, you increase the chances of a positive and meaningful interaction.

2. Create a Familiar Environment

Tip: Bring items from home that have sentimental value, such as family photos, favorite music, or familiar objects. These items can help trigger positive memories and conversations.

Personal items like a well-worn blanket, a favorite book, or a beloved family photo album can provide comfort and a sense of continuity. For example, if your loved one enjoyed gardening, bringing a small potted plant might spark memories and lead to a discussion about their favorite flowers or gardening tips they used to share.

3. Be Present

Tip: Focus on the present moment during your visit. Remove distractions like phones to give your full attention to your loved one.

Being present means engaging fully in the moment, without multitasking or distractions. Turn off your phone or put it on silent and avoid checking it during the visit. If your loved one wants to talk, listen intently, making them feel heard and valued. If they enjoy silence, simply sitting together quietly can be equally meaningful.

4. Use Simple Language

Tip: Speak slowly and use simple, clear language. Avoid complex sentences or questions that might confuse them.

Instead of asking, “What would you like to do today?” try breaking it down: “Would you like to look at photos or listen to music?” Avoid overwhelming them with too many options and give them time to process each question. Use short, direct sentences and be patient if they need extra time to respond.

5. Maintain Eye Contact

Tip: Keep friendly eye contact to help establish a connection. Non-verbal cues are often more effective than words.

Eye contact is a powerful way to communicate respect and attention. When speaking to your loved one, try to be at their eye level rather than standing over them. A gentle smile and warm gaze can convey your presence and care, even if they struggle to follow the conversation. Remember that in dementia care, non-verbal communication can sometimes be more impactful than words.

6. Stay Positive

Tip: Use a positive and calm tone of voice. Your loved one can sense your emotions, so maintaining a positive attitude can help create a relaxed atmosphere.

Your tone and demeanor set the mood for the visit. If your loved one becomes confused or agitated, respond with calmness and reassurance. For example, instead of saying, “No, that’s not right,” try, “That’s an interesting thought. Tell me more about it.” Keeping your interactions positive helps maintain a peaceful and enjoyable environment.

7. Listen Actively

Tip: Encourage them to talk and share their thoughts. Listen actively and respond with empathy, even if the conversation is fragmented or repetitive.

Active listening involves more than just hearing words; it means fully engaging with what your loved one is saying. Nod, smile, and give verbal affirmations like “I see” or “That sounds nice.” If they repeat a story, listen as if you’re hearing it for the first time. This approach can make them feel valued and respected, fostering a deeper emotional connection.

8. Engage in Activities

Tip: Bring simple, enjoyable activities like old photo albums to look through.

Choose activities that align with your loved one’s interests and abilities. For example, if they enjoyed painting, consider bringing some simple art supplies. If they loved music, create a playlist of their favorite songs. Activities don’t have to be complex; even sorting through old photographs together can spark conversations and create a shared experience.

9. Follow Their Lead

Tip: Let your loved one guide the conversation and activities. If they show interest in a particular topic, go with it, even if it seems random.

Dementia can cause thoughts to wander, leading to unexpected or seemingly random topics. If your loved one suddenly starts talking about a childhood memory or asking about an old friend, follow their lead. Engaging with what interests them in the moment can lead to more meaningful and less stressful interactions for both of you.

10. Be Patient

Tip: Dementia can cause communication difficulties and memory lapses. Give them time to respond and avoid correcting them if they make a mistake.

Patience is key when interacting with someone who has dementia. Avoid interrupting or rushing them as they search for the right words. If they confuse names or events, gently redirect the conversation rather than correcting them. For example, if they call you by the wrong name, you might respond with, "Yes, it's so nice to be here with you." This approach reduces frustration and helps maintain a calm, positive atmosphere.

11. Physical Touch

Tip: Offer gentle physical contact if appropriate, such as holding their hand or giving a hug. Physical touch can provide comfort and reassurance.

Human touch is a powerful tool for connection. If your loved one is comfortable with it, holding their hand or giving a gentle hug can provide comfort and convey your presence. For example, if they seem anxious, a gentle pat on the back or holding their hand can be soothing. Always be mindful of their preferences, as some individuals may not appreciate physical contact.

***"Inspired by the Montessori philosophy:
'Everything you do for me, you take from me.'"***

12. Limit Choices

Tip: Offer limited choices to avoid overwhelming them. For example, ask if they would like tea or coffee rather than presenting a range of options.

Limiting choices makes decisions easier for someone with dementia. Instead of asking, "What would you like to eat?" which can be overwhelming, you could ask, "Would you like soup or a sandwich?"

This approach simplifies decision-making and reduces anxiety, allowing your loved one to feel more in control without being burdened by too many options.

13. Use Visual Cues

Tip: Show objects or make gestures to help them understand what you're saying. Visual cues can make communication easier.

Visual aids can be extremely helpful in bridging communication gaps. For instance, if you're asking if they want to go for a walk, you might gesture towards the door or show them their shoes. If discussing a specific memory, showing a related photograph can help trigger recognition and understanding. Visual cues support verbal communication, making it easier for your loved one to grasp the meaning behind your words.

14. Appeal to the Senses

Tip: Use sensory experiences like aromatherapy, soft textures, or soothing music to create a calm and pleasant environment.

Engaging the senses can be a powerful way to connect with someone who has dementia. For example, the scent of lavender can be calming, while the smell of baking cookies might trigger fond memories of home. Consider bringing a soft blanket or a familiar piece of fabric to touch, or playing gentle music that your loved one enjoys. These sensory experiences can help create a soothing atmosphere and evoke positive emotions.

15. Monitor Comfort

Tip: Pay attention to signs of discomfort or fatigue. If your loved one seems tired or agitated, it might be time to end the visit.

It's important to be attuned to your loved one's physical and emotional state. If they start showing signs of discomfort—such as fidgeting, becoming

restless, or looking distressed—take a moment to assess whether they need a break. For instance, if they seem tired, consider shortening the visit or suggesting a restful activity like listening to calming music. Being responsive to their needs helps ensure that the visit remains a positive experience.

16. Share Moments of Joy

Tip: Focus on sharing moments of joy, laughter, and connection. These emotional bonds can have a lasting positive impact.

Joyful moments, no matter how small, can significantly enhance the quality of your visit. Share a funny story, watch a lighthearted movie, or simply enjoy a good laugh together. Even if the moment is brief, it can leave a lasting impression of warmth and connection. Creating these positive experiences helps strengthen the emotional bond between you and your loved one, making future visits more anticipated and enjoyable.

17. Capture Memories

Tip: Consider taking photos or recording snippets of your visit to remember later and share with other family members.

Capturing moments from your visits can create a cherished record for both you and your loved one. Take photos of your activities together or record a short video of a conversation or shared laughter. These memories can be shared with other family members who may not be able to visit regularly, helping them stay connected. Additionally, these captured moments can be revisited during future visits, serving as a comforting reminder of the time spent together.

18. Respect Their Pace

Tip: Keep in mind that your loved one's energy and attention span may be limited. Shorter, more frequent visits may be more effective than long visits.

Everyone's energy levels vary, especially for someone with dementia. Consider scheduling shorter, more frequent visits rather than long ones that might tire them out. For example, a 30-minute visit every few days might be more enjoyable for them than a two-hour visit once a week. Pay attention to their cues—if they seem to lose interest or become fatigued, it may be time to wrap up. Respecting their pace ensures that each visit is a positive experience without overwhelming them.

19. Use Familiar Music

Tip: Play music that is meaningful or familiar to your loved one. Music can evoke memories and emotions, making the visit more enjoyable and engaging.

Music has a unique ability to trigger memories and emotions. Create a playlist of songs that your loved one used to enjoy or bring along a favorite album. For instance, if they loved a particular artist in their youth, playing that music can evoke pleasant memories and feelings of nostalgia. Even if they can't express it verbally, the familiar tunes might prompt a smile, a hum, or even a dance, making the visit more interactive and joyful.

20. Bring Comforting Scents

Tip: Scents like lavender, vanilla, or fresh-baked cookies can create a soothing environment and may trigger positive memories.

Scent is a powerful memory trigger. Consider bringing along a small sachet of lavender, a vanilla-scented candle (unlit, if candles aren't allowed), or even freshly baked cookies. These familiar and comforting smells can evoke feelings of warmth and safety. For example, the smell of fresh flowers might remind them of their garden, or the scent of vanilla could bring back memories of baking at home. These sensory experiences can help ground them in the present moment while stirring positive emotions.

21. Incorporate Gentle Movement

Tip: If appropriate, consider doing some light stretching or a slow, simple walk. Gentle movement can be calming and helps maintain physical health.

Gentle movement can be both physically and mentally beneficial. If your loved one is able, suggest a slow walk around the facility's garden or a simple stretching routine. This not only promotes physical health but also helps reduce restlessness and anxiety. For example, a short walk outside can be refreshing and a nice change of scenery, while gentle arm or leg stretches can relieve stiffness and provide a sense of well-being.

22. Bring a Pet (If Allowed)

Tip: If your loved one enjoys animals and the facility allows it, consider bringing a pet to visit. Interaction with pets can be comforting and uplifting.

Many people find comfort and joy in the presence of animals. If your loved one has always been fond of pets, bringing a calm, well-behaved dog or cat for a visit (if permitted) can be a wonderful experience. The pet's presence can provide comfort, reduce stress, and even evoke memories of past pets. For example, petting a dog or cat can be soothing, and the simple act of watching an animal play can bring smiles and laughter. ***Always check with the facility first to ensure pets are allowed and appropriate.***

23. Read Aloud

Tip: Read a favorite book, poem, or short story to your loved one. Even if they can't follow the narrative, the sound of your voice can be soothing.

Reading aloud can be a comforting and engaging activity. Choose a book, poem, or story that your loved one enjoys or has fond memories of. For example, you might read a favorite childhood book or a classic poem they once loved. Even if they don't fully follow the story, the rhythm and tone of

your voice can provide comfort. This activity can also serve as a way to fill any quiet moments with something familiar and pleasant.

24. Ask About Their Past

Tip: Engage them in conversations about their past. Ask open-ended questions about their childhood, career, or favorite memories, even if the answers are repetitive.

Talking about the past can be reassuring for someone with dementia, as long-term memories are often more intact. Ask them about their childhood, significant life events, or favorite hobbies. For instance, “What was your favorite subject in school?” or “Tell me about the house you grew up in.” Even if the stories are repeated, listening with interest and encouraging them to share can create a sense of validation and connection. These conversations can be a comforting trip down memory lane and provide valuable insights into their life experiences.

25. Celebrate Small Victories

Tip: Praise and acknowledge even the smallest achievements during the visit, such as remembering a name or completing an activity. This can boost their confidence and mood.

Every accomplishment, no matter how small, is worth celebrating. If your loved one remembers your name, completes a puzzle, or even just smiles at a familiar song, acknowledge it with enthusiasm. For example, saying, “I’m so glad you remembered that!” or “You did such a great job with this puzzle!” can make them feel proud and boost their mood. These moments of positive reinforcement can help build their confidence and make the visit more uplifting.

26. Involve Other Family Members

Tip: If possible, include other family members in the visit, either in person or through a video call. Seeing multiple familiar faces can bring comfort and joy.

Bringing in other family members, either in person or virtually, can create a more dynamic and comforting experience for your loved one. If in-person visits aren't possible, arrange a video call where multiple family members can join. For example, a video call with grandchildren can bring joy and a sense of continuity. This interaction helps maintain family bonds and provides a variety of familiar faces, which can be both comforting and stimulating for your loved one.

27. Practice Patience and Flexibility

Tip: Be prepared to change plans if your loved one is not in the mood for certain activities. Flexibility is key to ensuring a positive visit.

Flexibility is essential when visiting someone with dementia, as their mood and energy levels can change unexpectedly. If your planned activity isn't resonating, be ready to switch gears. For example, if they seem uninterested in looking at photos, perhaps try listening to music instead. Being adaptable allows you to meet your loved one where they are at that moment, ensuring the visit remains positive and stress-free.

28. Leave on a Positive Note

Tip: End the visit on a high note by expressing love and positivity. A warm goodbye can leave a lasting impression, even if the visit was short.

The way you end a visit can leave a lasting impression. Make sure to express love and positivity as you say goodbye. For instance, give them a warm hug, tell them how much you enjoyed the visit, and reassure them that you'll be back soon. Even if the visit was short or didn't go as planned, leaving on a positive note helps ensure that your loved one feels valued and cherished.

29. Use Memory Triggers

Tip: Bring along items that might trigger specific memories, like a favorite old movie, a piece of jewelry, or a postcard from a favorite vacation spot.

Familiar objects can help create moments of connection with your loved one. Consider bringing items that have personal meaning, such as a piece of jewelry they used to wear, a postcard from a memorable trip, a favourite scarf, a family photo, or music from a time they enjoyed.

These items may prompt conversation, memories, smiles, or simply a feeling of comfort. For example, showing a vacation postcard might lead to a story about the trip, the people they were with, or the place they visited. Even if your loved one does not remember the details, the item may still create a pleasant moment.

Try not to test their memory by asking, “Do you remember this?” Instead, gently offer the item and say something like, “I found this postcard from your trip to Florida. The beach looks beautiful.” Then follow their response.

30. Give Reassurance

Tip: Regularly offer reassurance throughout the visit, reminding them that they are loved and cared for. This can help ease any anxiety or confusion they may feel.

Reassurance is crucial in helping someone with dementia feel safe and loved. Throughout your visit, gently remind your loved one that they are cared for and loved. Simple phrases like “I’m here with you,” “You’re not alone,” or “I love you” can provide comfort and reduce anxiety. If they become confused or anxious, offer calming words and perhaps a gentle touch to reassure them of your presence and support. These reassurances can help create a sense of security and peace during your visit.



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Disclaimer:

The information, tips, and advice provided in this eBook are intended to enhance the experience of visiting loved ones with cognitive impairments.

The author does not provide or endorse specific tools or materials. Any tools or materials used during visits should be carefully considered in consultation with a healthcare professional or caregiver, as their use could potentially cause harm to the individual.

The author assumes no responsibility for any negative outcomes that may arise from the use of tools or materials. Always prioritize the safety and specific needs of your loved one when implementing the suggestions in this eBook.