

The global COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we interact in our communities and public spaces. Staying connected and engaged is a challenge for all of us, but particularly for people living with dementia. Ensuring the community is dementia friendly has become even more important.

Here are some things you can do in your workplace to build on your dementia-friendly communication skills while keeping everyone safe.



## Lead with empathy...

- Like many of us, people living with dementia may be isolated from family and friends because of physical distancing restrictions
- The isolation can affect mental health, leading to increased anxiety and/or confusion
- Try to meet people “where they are,” rather than expecting them to “be where you are.”
- Allow them to express themselves and mirror their emotions

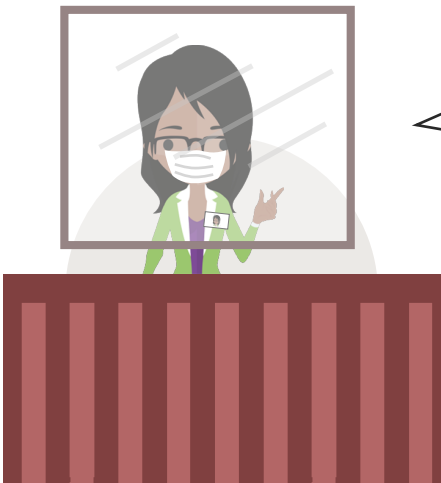
## Keep in mind what the person living with dementia may be experiencing...

- They may be less aware of current events and have difficulty understanding the need for personal protective equipment (PPE) and other precautions
- They may also have difficulty keeping up with and following the rules because safety protocols can vary depending on the setting and change frequently due to local conditions
- They may have difficulty moving about in the space if there is a lot more signage or familiar routes/landmarks have been changed to accommodate spacing requirements



## So, if the person has questions or concerns about your procedures...

- Stay calm, respectful and patient and use simplified explanations
- Consider displaying clear signage with examples of your organization’s protocols that people can refer to if they need a reminder
- Consider additional trained staff/greeters to offer support if people become disoriented in the space or uncertain about safety requirements



We all use body language and facial expressions to communicate, but people living with dementia often depend on these visual cues to interpret what is going on around them.

Unfortunately, the masks, face shields, plexiglass barriers and other PPE that help keep everyone safe can also interfere with a person living with dementia's ability to communicate because they block facial cues and muffle sound. So, here are a few ideas to help keep your interactions dementia friendly when everyone is wearing a mask.

## Take your communication skills up a notch...

- Stand in clear view of the person and allow time for them to process who is approaching – it may take a person living with dementia several seconds
- Consider wearing a name tag/photo and introducing yourself so the person knows whom they are speaking with because masks make it harder to recognize faces
- Limit background noise and move to a quieter space if necessary
- Maintain eye contact and use the parts of your face that the person can see – especially your eyes and eyebrows – to help convey your message
- Be aware of your tone and speak a little louder and a little slower
- Be more animated – use gestures and body language (pointing, nodding, etc.) to indicate objects and express emotions
- If appropriate, use the person's name often to maintain attention
- Give the person extra time to understand what is being asked of them and to respond
- Check for understanding. If the person looks confused or responds oddly, ask them if they need you to say it again or if they have questions
- Be extra patient. Repeat or rephrase calmly and don't rush the person. Politely ask the person to speak up/repeat themselves if you have difficulty understanding them
- Consider using signs for the questions you ask every customer, for example, "How many bags would you like?" or "How will you pay?" You can point to the questions and customers can point to the answer



1. Reidy, C. (2020). The Person Behind the Mask. Communicating with Clients Living with Dementia While Protecting Ourselves. Behavioural Supports Ontario.  
2. Ali, C. (n.d.). 8 tips to communicate better while wearing a face mask. UBC Brand and Marketing. Retrieved from: <https://beyond.ubc.ca/communicate-better-while-wearing-a-face-mask>