

Emergency situations, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, present special challenges to those caring for a loved one with dementia. While facing visitation restrictions, you may not be able to provide the hands-on care and face-to-face support you typically would, and you may feel that communication with those providing direct care is limited or uncertain. While being at a distance complicates caregiving, there are strategies to help:

Keeping in touch with your loved one's direct-care team

- ✓ Check with the care setting regarding their procedures for managing COVID-19 risk.
- ✓ Ask staff (administrators, nurses, social workers) the best way to get regular updates on your loved one and discuss their care; can you set up a virtual care planning conversation and/or get a regular email update?
- ✓ Think through:
 - ✓ What is your loved one's daily routine, preferences, and what soothes and reassures them?
 - ✓ How will COVID-19 restrictions change your loved one's routine and how might you work with staff to approximate their regular routine as closely as possible? (For example, if you visit every other day after lunch, consider setting up phone calls on the same days and times.)
- ✓ Work with staff to create a personal information form for your loved one. The information will be especially helpful for new or temporary staff. This form can be posted in a place where various staff will see it.
- ✓ Information on the form can include:
 - ✓ Cognitive abilities, motor skills, verbal processing and communication abilities and methods.
 - ✓ Individual's preferred name (and pronouns); cultural background; religious or spiritual practices; and past hobbies and interests.
 - ✓ Names and contact information for family and friends.
 - ✓ What upsets the person and what calms him or her down.
 - ✓ Sleep habits; eating and drinking patterns and abilities; typical patterns of behavior; and normal daily structure and routines.

Keeping in touch with your loved one

- ✓ While visitation is not allowed, consider other methods for connection, including phone calls, emails, postal mail and video chats using platforms like Google Hangouts, FaceTime, and Zoom.
- ✓ Choose communication platforms based on your preferences, your loved one's communication abilities and preferences, and the care staff's availability to facilitate the meeting.
- ✓ If possible, arrange with staff to connect with your loved one on a regular basis, ideally at a scheduled time each day. If scheduled check-ins are not possible, staff may be able to help relay back-and-forth recorded video or voice messages between you and your loved one.
- ✓ If verbal communication is difficult for your loved one, it may still be meaningful to connect via phone or video so that they can hear your voice and see your face. Try playing music, singing together, reciting a meaningful poem or text, or just saying hello.

- ✓ If the person with dementia is confused and distraught about the situation, how should you respond?
 - ✓ Consider your loved one's ability to understand and remember information that you share.
 - ✓ Depending on their ability to understand and remember, it may be very confusing, upsetting, and not helpful to be retold the details of COVID-19 several times.
 - ✓ Instead, respond to questions in whatever way will be most comfortable and easy to understand in the moment. You might explain the basic facts, or you might say something reassuring, even if not entirely true or factual, like "I'm out of town for work, but I'll be seeing you again soon. I'm so glad we can stay in touch!"

Tips For You

- ✓ Gather pertinent information and keep it handy. Make sure you have contact information for physicians, pharmacies, and care providers, as well as important financial and legal documents easily accessible in case they are unexpectedly needed.
- ✓ Ensure that care providers have your emergency contact information and the information of another family member or friend as a backup.
- ✓ If you have concerns about your loved one's care, contact the state ombudsman. Massachusetts: (617) 727-7750, New Hampshire: (603) 271-4375
- ✓ Offer yourself compassion during times of stress and difficulty. Prioritize self-care activities, reach out to your friends and family, and consider one of our caregiver support groups or educational programs.

**To consult about your unique situation, contact our 24/7 Helpline at
800.272.3900**

**Find all of our virtual programs and support groups at
alzmassnh.org/virtual-programs**

All information provided by the Alzheimer's Association MA/NH Chapter

**Our 24/7 Helpline is available for around-the-clock
care and support at 800.272.3900**