

Tips for Using Video Chat Platforms in Dementia Care



At Home & in Long-Term Care

Special Considerations for Long-Term Care Environments

Before You Start:

- Once you have your equipment (**iPad, computer, cell phone or tablet**), and you know the loved one also has the necessary equipment, you need to find out if they whether the internet will support a video call (remote areas may struggle with a video call).
- If using a non-secure platform to communicate (**FaceTime, Skype, Zoom**, etc.), ensure that users understand that privacy cannot be guaranteed. OTN, for example, is the only platform approved for sharing clinical information in some health care settings and the only platform permitted for use in that setting.
- **When equipment must be shared with multiple residents, book a time for each call – with a clear end time** – as families may want to stay connected for lengthy periods, and you may have others who would like to connect with their loved ones. Establish parameters before you begin the call.
- If it is reasonable, and possible, you may want to **create a schedule** so families, and those in your care, know when they will be connecting with each other.
- Check the **policies and protocols** of your organization related to **confidentiality and privacy**. There may be strict guidelines about sharing certain types of information on a video call (such as a diagnosis or findings from recent medical testing). **Know the rules before you begin** – as families may want to know details while you are close at hand – and you may be in no position to share those details.
- **Wash and sanitize hands** before you begin. Sanitize materials before and after use, following organizational and public health policies and guidelines.
- Help loved ones to become comfortable with using this new way of connecting from afar. Newcomers to this technology may be reluctant to use these new devices and may need the support of those who are more comfortable with these new methods. Help them to understand this is easier than it looks. All they need is the equipment and someone to guide them through the steps until they are connected. Make sure they have learned what to do before they connect with the person with dementia.

Helpful Hints for Video Chats with Individuals with Dementia

Set the Scene

- Ensure that the conversation takes place in a **quiet environment**.
- Establish a rule of etiquette, recommending that only **one person will talk at a time**.
- Provide headphones (wipeable) to those who may have difficulty hearing. Make sure the **volume is loud enough** to be easily heard.
- Ask users to **stay seated during the conversation, facing directly in to the camera** on their phone/tablet/computer. Callers that move around during the conversation will create an unnecessary distraction for the person with dementia/ special needs.
- Ask users to seat themselves against a high contrast background – **plain wall if possible**.
- **Do not position yourself in front of a window**, and ask the loved one to do the same, as the glare from outside light will make viewing difficult.

Support the Person

- Families and friends often worry about whether their loved one, with dementia, will remember them. This concern seems to heighten when loved ones cannot visit face to face. Help loved ones to understand that it is more important to connect than to focus on whether the person with dementia remembers who they are. While they may think the person may not remember them, ensure them that they have not been forgotten.
- The facilitator should verbally introduce the loved one to the person with dementia (including relationship). For example, **“This is your daughter, Cathy.”**
- Consider providing visual prompts for the person with dementia. For example, put a large print note beside the computer/tablet/iPad, on top of the table, with information such as: **“Jean is talking to her daughter, Cathy.” Or “I am talking to my daughter Cathy.”**
- If the person seems distressed by the video chat experience, consider whether it is the wrong time, wrong place, or something else (pain, noise, bad connection). If it is none of these, ask yourself if this is an appropriate intervention for this person.

Sustaining the Conversation

- Engage in conversations that **set the person with dementia up for success.**
 - **Share some facts** – details about recent events. What’s new in your life or in the world around you? What would he/she understand or enjoy hearing about? Consider whether you need to simplify your statements, or if your loved one can follow a longer train of thought.
 - **Reminisce – with facts.** For example, “Mom, I used to love the dresses you made for me.” “Did your mother teach you how to sew?” This one is a “yes” or “no” answer – that may stimulate other memories and open up the lines of conversation. Some people may be able to provide facts about the past (such as who their best friend was when they were little). If, however, they struggle, provide a possible answer (E.g. – Was your best friend Mary?).
 - Have some **funny jokes** available to tell, or if you could prepare them ahead of time, as large print jokes, and ask the person with dementia to read them to their loved one.
 - Focus on **closed questions that offer a choice of possible answers.**
 - Rather than asking the person, “What is your favourite flavour of ice cream?” You might ask “What type of ice cream do you like better, chocolate or vanilla?” When you provide an answer, rather than ask for the brain to retrieve an answer, you set the person up for success. And if the answer isn’t the one you were expecting, don’t argue. Go with the flow! For example, “Oh that is mine too!”
 - Consider coming up with a list of questions (conversation starters) before engaging in the interaction. This is a great activity to do together when visiting, as it sets the person with dementia up for success. If the answer is not actually the correct one – does it matter? Perhaps the loved one could respond with, “Oh, I didn’t know that mom”. DementiAbility has two books that offer a wide variety of conversation starters: **Let’s Chat** and **Let’s Chat Some More**. These are available at www.dementiability.com
You might be surprised at the responses generated from these questions!
 - Listen to favourite tunes and/or sing your loved one’s favourite songs with him/her.
 - Find some children’s story books and ask the person with dementia to read a story to grandchildren – any children.

- Find some favourite poems, prayers or passages that would be enjoyed by the person with dementia. The person with dementia could read the prayer or passage – or the loved one could read it. In fact, why not try to make up a poem – together?
- If the person is able, he/she may enjoy playing a simple card game over video chat (such as the game of war (both of you turn a card over, and the highest card wins)).
- If the person is non-verbal, consider reading a passage from a favourite book or telling him/her a short story or singing a song. Regardless of their cognitive status, they may still enjoy seeing you and hearing your voice.

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