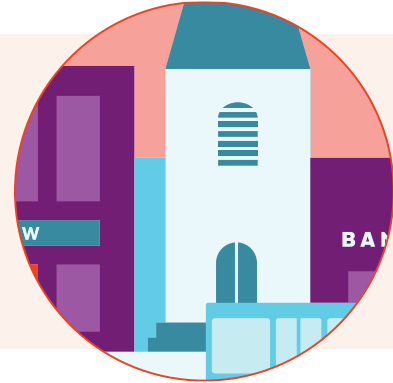




Faith Communities

Dementia friendly faith communities can provide an important spiritual respite. As welcoming, compassionate environments, they offer families coping with dementia opportunities for meaningful engagement and spiritual connection. Through dementia friendly practices, entire faith communities can embrace and uplift people with dementia and their care partners.



Ready to implement dementia friendly practices? Follow the steps:

1

Prepare

- Recognize the signs of dementia and encourage early diagnosis.
- Know local services that help people with dementia and their care partners.

2

Learn

- Learn to use dementia friendly communication skills.
- Raise awareness by involving all ages in dementia education.

3

Respond

- Ensure the environment, programs and activities are engaging, dementia friendly and suited to the situations, abilities and interests of each person with dementia.
- Support care partners and families and recognize and respond to signs of care partner stress.
- Raise awareness, reduce stigma, and promote support in your community and others by spreading dementia friendly principles.

Signs of Dementia¹

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life.
- Challenges in planning or solving problems.
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure.
- Confusion with time or place.
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.
- New problems with words in speaking or writing.
- Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps.
- Decreased or poor judgment.
- Withdrawal from work or social activities.
- Changes in mood or personality.

Dementia Friendly Communication Skills^{2,3}

- Greet people warmly even if you think they do not remember you. If they seem confused, remind them who you are.
- Slow pace slightly and allow time for person to process and respond.
- Speak clearly and calmly; be patient and understanding.
- Keep communication simple; ask one question at a time.
- Listen with empathy and seek to understand the person's reality or feelings.
- Connect on an emotional level even if the conversation topics shift or do not make sense to you.
- Be aware of the person's and your own body language: smile, make eye contact at eye level.
- Enjoy spending time with the person in the present moment.
- Offer hugs, hand holding as appropriate.
- Avoid arguing with or embarrassing the person.
- Treat the person with dignity and respect.

Educate the Entire Faith Community^{1,2}

1. Invite a person living with dementia or a care partner to give a talk about their experience living with the disease.
2. Provide ideas for ways to support people with dementia.
 - Offer to help a person get ready for worship services or assist with transportation.
 - Express willingness to spend time with the person with dementia so that their care partner can run errands or take a break.
 - Help the family worship at home or bring them a recording of the service when they find it difficult to attend in person.
 - Offer a volunteer companion when extra support is needed.
 - Accept and be sensitive to behaviors that people with dementia may display, such as talking, calling out, or walking about at inappropriate times; respond flexibly to encourage people to remain involved or help them to another area if necessary.
 - Help people with dementia feel loved, valued, and a sense of belonging at a time when they may feel isolated.
 - Provide ongoing prayer support for the person with dementia and their family/care partners.

Dementia Friendly Practices

1. Environmental tips:

- Wear name tags.
- Welcome, acknowledge, and support congregants and visitors with dementia.
- Be positive and focus on strengths and abilities rather than limitations.
- Be patient and understanding of appearance and behavior.
- Provide a quiet area where the person may go during the service as needed.
- Display signs that clearly identify areas such as restrooms.

2. Engage:

- Organize activities that are meaningful to people with dementia, allow them to connect with others, and accommodate their changing abilities.
- Offer shorter, simpler services, devotions or inspirational stories.
- Encourage all ability levels when planning activities and outings.

- Plan visits that create spiritual connections and maximize interaction through familiar prayer or scripture or traditional hymns.
- Go beyond words and use music and spiritual symbols to engage the senses.
- Recognize the spiritual significance of spending time outdoors in nature or appreciating the arts.
- Organize a dementia café or early stage support group.

3. Individualize:

- Build support relationships by linking people with dementia and their care partners with empathetic individuals within the congregation.
- Learn how the spiritual beliefs of the person with dementia and his or her care partners may affect their perceptions and experience of dementia.
- Be attuned and open-minded to the way the person talks about his or her spirituality.

Care Partners, Families and Stress

- Recognize signs of care partner stress and direct the care partner/family to appropriate resources.⁴
 1. Denial of the disease and belief person will get better.
 2. Anger.
 3. Social withdrawal from activities once enjoyed.
 4. Anxiety about the future.
 5. Depression that breaks ability to cope.
 6. Exhaustion that makes completing everyday tasks difficult.
 7. Sleeplessness.
 8. Irritability.
 9. Lack of concentration.
 10. Health problems.
- Encourage care partners to take good care of themselves – eat properly, get regular exercise, rest, and accept help from others.
- Offer support frequently, even if it is turned down.
- When caregiving prevents attending in person, help care partners participate in worship at home by providing services, rituals, or recordings.
- Encourage the care partner to enroll the person with dementia in respite care for a break from daily responsibilities.
- Form a care partner support group.

References

1. **Alzheimer's Association, Know the 10 Signs**
http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_10_signs_of_alzheimers.asp
2. **Alzheimer's Society – Communicating**
https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/info/20064/symptoms/90/communicating_and_language
3. **Home Instead Business Training – Alzheimer's Friendly Business online course**
<http://www.helpforalzheimersfamilies.com/alzheimers-care-training/alzheimers-friendly-business-training/>
4. **Alzheimer's Association, Caregiver Stress**
<https://www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-caregiver-stress-burnout.asp>

Additional Resources

Dementia Friendly America

- **DFA Sector Video – Faith Communities**
<http://www.dfamerica.org/sector-videos/>

Others

- **Act on Alzheimer's, Faith Resources**
<http://www.actonalz.org/faith-communities>
- **Clergy Against Alzheimer's**
<https://www.usagainstalzheimers.org/networks/faith>
- **Dementia Friendly Massachusetts - How to Become a Dementia Friendly Faith Community**
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/559c4229e4b0482682e8df9b/t/5ba132c54ae237511cd63edc/1537290949795/Faith+Community+Info+Sheet.pdf>
- **Faith United Against Alzheimer's**
<https://www.usagainstalzheimers.org/our-enterprise/faith-united-coalition>
- **Faith United Against Alzheimer's, Creating Dementia Friendly Faith Communities**
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/559c4229e4b0482682e8df9b/t/5baa969f08522977c1876589/1537906335858/USA2_Faith+Coalition+and+Dementia+One+Pager_COMMUNITIES_WEB+VERSION_March+8+2018.pdf
- **Giving Voice Chorus**
<https://givingvoicechorus.org/start-chorus/general-operations/working-within-a-dementia-friendly-environment/>
- **Developing a Dementia-Friendly Church: A Practical Guide**
<https://actonalz.org/sites/default/files/documents/Dementia-Friendly-Church-Guide.pdf>
- **Share the Care: Faith Communities**
<https://sharethecare.org/faith-communities/>

Churches, synagogues, and other places of worship are just one important part of the community. These faith communities can work alongside other sectors to help the entire community become more dementia friendly. Learn more about the process and help your community and others at www.dfamerica.org.



Adapted from ACT on Alzheimer's® developed tools and resources.