

Dementia Friendly Meetings (Guidance prepared by SDWG)

Organising meetings for people with a diagnosis of dementia requires a little more thinking and preparation. Here is a guide to some of the things to consider. It is by no means exhaustive and is a continual learning document as more is learnt from our SDWG members about their needs.

Timing



- A mid-morning start and mid-afternoon finish is preferable.
- People with dementia often need longer to get themselves ready for a meeting. Rush, noise and crowds are more difficult to contend with.
- Going to a strange venue in a different area can also be more challenging.
- Many people with dementia report a noticed drop in energy later in the afternoon - please keep this in mind when scheduling important discussions.

Choice of location



- Try to choose a venue close to a major public transport route.
- Parking facilities are helpful if no public transport to the venue is possible.
- Buses in unfamiliar areas can be difficult for people with dementia.

Choice of venue



- Full accessibility (lifts *and* staircases with handrails).
- Loop hearing system.
- Spacious rooms; avoid cramped environment.
- Good lighting is particularly important for people with dementia as it can help them make sense of their environment.
- Mirrored walls can be confusing.

Choice of venue (continued)



- Swirly carpets or 'busy' floors can induce nausea and dizziness as people can lose cues as to where one space stops and other starts.
- Background noise from traffic, air conditioning etc. can be problematic.

Signage



- People with dementia need support to orientate so signage to bathrooms, break out rooms, cloakrooms, tea and coffee etc. is helpful.
- Signage with words and symbols together are preferable e.g. ladies toilet with image of female.

Quiet space



- Sometimes a busy meeting, feeling tired, over loaded with information or overwhelmed can trigger a sense of panic, fatigue or a need to just remove yourself from a situation. A specifically assigned quiet room or space where people can retire for a short unscheduled break is helpful. Ideally breakout rooms should be close to the main meeting room.

Toilets



- Clearly signed - words and symbols together are preferable.
- Are they big enough (people don't always want to go in the disabled loo if otherwise mobile).
- Are flushes, taps, locks etc. obvious in the way they work? If not put up a helpful sign!

Name Badges



- These are essential. A clearly written name and who person is should be displayed. Sticky labels clearly written are fine.

Seating



- Ideally provide space near the front/close to the speaker – communication is harder if you have dementia so helps to clearly see speakers and any screens.
- Make seating area spacious as mobility may be affected (e.g. turning, stepping over objects etc).

Microphones



- Insist in the use of microphones when in a large rooms, even for those who advise they can speak loudly. If you are hard of hearing, near the back or have greater communication difficulties a muffled voice is a barrier.

Timing



- Keep presentations to maximum of 10 minutes. Concentration is lessened beyond this. If presentations are longer than this, it is helpful if the speaker pauses and recaps before moving on.
- Back to back presentations don't work for people with dementia – either break up the presentation with discussion or table in short 5-minute breaks.
- Build natural breaks into the event.

Speakers



- Slow clear delivery.
- PowerPoint slides help add focus (e.g. an image that reflects the message or headings) however busy slides or slides in small print are not helpful.

Workshops



- Make task instructions clear – provide a written copy of the task so people can find their place again if they have lost the discussion thread.

Workshops (continued)



- For people with dementia following discussions may be a little more difficult and word finding may take longer therefore patience is vital.
- Have 'prompt' questions and present them clearly.
- Give people plenty of time to respond.
- Avoid many people talking at once and give an opportunity for anyone who has not spoken to have a say before moving on - many people won't interrupt to make their point.
- Using 'I want to speak' and 'I need help' cards are useful for helping people to participate in discussions. There are many of our members who engage well in small group discussions and will easily hold their own in a mixed group. Be prepared for some variety in capacity and confidence. Generally, a small discussion group will get a better response than comments from the floor. Many people find small group discussions where groups are next to each other difficult as ability to discriminate background noise can deteriorate. So, ensure the room is large enough to facilitate this.
- Provide opportunities to come back to things – e.g. post its, stickers on walls is good practice.
- People have also enjoyed having to move to larger sheets on walls that ask questions and the response is placed on the sheet on the wall.
- People often like sitting at tables with access to large sheets of paper and the discussion is written up as it goes along.

Refreshments



- Provide people with regular access to tea, coffee, water etc.
- If you can provide a sandwich or soup if working around lunch time you will have better functioning participants. Plain sandwich fillings that are easily identifiable with signs advising what is in them are helpful.
- Check specific dietary requirements before any meetings.

Expenses



- If you are providing expenses to people at the event it is good practice to carry a petty cash tin so people can claim on day.
- Remembering to send in receipts at a later date can be too difficult for people. Leniency in requirements to produce receipts is very much appreciated.

Assistance at meetings



- Identifiable facilitators and meeting supporters are essential.
- They should wear sashes or particular coloured shirt/blouse, small badges that you have to get up close to see is not as helpful.

Paperwork



Papers should be sent out in good time and not too near the date of the meeting. Around 7 – 10 days is ideal. A reminder letter, email and/or phone call nearer the time is also particularly helpful. Invitations should include information about:

- Venue address and how to get there.
- What the event is about and any background information that would be helpful.
- Details of contact person should they need assistance.
- Who to contact if they can no longer attend.
- What is expected of them at the event and if they are required to bring anything.

Preparing notes and instructions



- Clear fonts style with minimum size 14.
- Keep words to minimum and use short clear sentences.
- Key facts in bullet points.

Preparing notes and instructions (continued)



- Keep page simple, busy pages are confusing.
- Break up text with white space, boxed information or simple graphics.
- Single sided pages are advisable – we don't necessarily think to turn the page over.
- Page numbering.
- Don't use abbreviations or acronyms.

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run by people with dementia