



The  
**Dementia  
Society**  
Ottawa and Renfrew County

# COMMUNICATING BY PHONE OR INTERNET



Are you communicating from a distance with a person living with dementia? It can sometimes be difficult to converse over the phone or internet. The good news is that there are ways to make communicating more positive:

## CONSIDER THE MEDIUM

When choosing to connect by phone or internet, consider the person's background. Do they normally use technology? Do they need help setting it up? Would they enjoy using it?

**Tip:** What works one day may not work the next. You may have to adjust and adapt on a regular basis.

## CONSIDER THE PURPOSE

Start by setting realistic expectations for your conversation. If your goal is to have a productive conversation, you might end up feeling disappointed. If your goal is to reduce isolation or provide social stimulation, it does not matter what you talk about. It only matters that you reach out and make the connection.

**Tip:** The conversation does not have to be long. A quick chat to check-in can make a person feel cared for.

## CONSIDER THEIR PERSPECTIVE

You might find the call boring, but the person might be happy to hear your voice and have someone to talk to. You might find the call repetitive, but the topic could be especially important to them.

**Tip:** Try not to focus on a person's repetition. Instead focus on the underlying emotion. Are they feeling happy, sad, or frustrated about the topic? Respond to the emotion. For example, you could say, "that sounds frustrating, I am glad you told me about it."

# CONSIDER THE ACTIVITY

Introducing variety to the conversation can help you and the person stay engaged. Here are ideas to get you started:

## Reminisce:

- You select a topic from long ago like a wedding or family pet. Ask them questions about it. The more severe their memory impairment is, the further back you want to go. Be patient and prepared to hear the same story again.

## Play Games:

- Try a guessing game. Give them as many clues as needed.
  - For example, tell them: “I’m looking at something that is black and rectangular. I can see it from my couch, and it plays movies”
- Ask a question, and then you both answer it. For example:
  - Share something you like about me
  - Tell me something you are grateful for

## Other Activities:

- Tell jokes or find interesting facts to share.
- Ask them to walk you through their favourite recipe. It does not matter if the steps are correct or if you actually do it.
- Share an experience: Read a book out loud together. Sing together. Watch the same movie.
- For more ideas on meaningful activities, visit: <https://dementiahelp.ca/virtual-program-categorie/meaningful-activities/>

# REMEMBER TO SHARE THE CARE

- Start a calling chain: Set up a schedule for when each family member or friend will call.
- Set up a virtual friendly visitor through the Take a Break program: <https://dementiahelp.ca/virtual-program-categorie/virtual-remote-respite/>
- Set up telephone safety checks: <https://communitysupport.covidresponse.ca/>
- Try out a virtual senior centre: <https://thegoodcompanions.ca/programs-services/seniors-centre-without-walls/>

# FIND OTHER WAYS TO CONNECT

Some people cannot use technology or a telephone. Instead, consider other ways to get connected:

- Write a letter: If they can read, a letter can be personal and special. They will be able to pick it up again and again.
- Send old memories: They may appreciate receiving old photographs. People with dementia often remember their younger years quite well.
- Visit from a distance: Visit the person from outside a window, or from a distance outside. Try playing music or bringing the family pet to put a smile on their face.

To learn more strategies for caring from a distance, watch this webinar: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xlo9jfa9B-AQ&list=PLqiA3A3X-xLlqa8QwqUFCxgLTLr1hLG53&index=13&t=0s>

To seek guidance for your unique caregiving situation, contact your Dementia Care Coach. If you don't have a Dementia care Coach, call us at:

**Ottawa:** 613-523-4004 **Renfrew-County:** 1-888-411-2067 | [info@dsorc.org](mailto:info@dsorc.org) | [DementiaHelp.ca](https://DementiaHelp.ca)

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