

# Working With Dementia: Safe Work Practices for Caregivers



**NOTE:** Modules 4 and 5 in the *Working With Dementia* video series are no longer available, effective May 2022.

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## Introduction

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Dementia will develop in approximately 1 in 11 people over the age of 65. About 500,000 people in Canada, including over 70,000 in B.C., live with some form of dementia — these numbers will increase as the population ages.

People with dementia experience declines in intellectual function such as the use of language and numbers, awareness of what is going on around them, judgment, and the ability to reason, solve problems, and think abstractly. They may not be able to verbally communicate their physical or mental needs. Behavioural or psychological symptoms of dementia may include need-driven behaviour or even responsive or self-protective behaviour, commonly referred to as aggression or violence. It is important for caregivers to understand that behaviour has meaning and to explore what the underlying causes may be.

## About the video

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The video consists of a series of modules that describe how to care for people with dementia. The introductory module provides general information on dementia. The remaining modules use enactments to portray situations that caregivers may encounter when caring for a person with dementia, and show how to respond to similar situations in order to stay safe and support the person with dementia.

The modules were filmed in a residential care environment, but the information and techniques

in the video are applicable to all healthcare and social service settings. The video is appropriate for employers, supervisors, workers, members of joint occupational safety and health committees, and educators. It can be used for safety meetings, incorporated into existing education and training programs, or used for worker orientation.

The video may also be helpful for people who are caring for a family member who is living with dementia.

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## About this discussion guide

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This video discussion guide contains viewing strategies and support materials that will help viewers learn more about different techniques to care for people with dementia. This guide includes suggested discussion points for each of the video modules. There is also a section at the end of the guide directing readers to other resources.

The video and guide are meant to be an initial step in raising awareness of strategies when caring for someone with dementia; they are not intended to be a comprehensive look at this issue.

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## How to use the discussion guide

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After viewing each module, engage the viewers in a discussion using some or all of the suggested discussion points. Some of the questions include a list of possible answers, while others are left open ended. Remember that there is not one correct answer to any of these questions; they are only intended to promote the sharing of information.

# Module 1:

## May I come in?



### How to approach residents

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Before providing care for people with dementia, it is important to learn as much as you can about them. Before entering their personal space, stop and take note of your own emotional state. (People with dementia are exquisitely tuned to the body language of others.) Go slow, and evaluate how they are responding. Even though you may have successfully approached the person yesterday, there is no guarantee that he or she will remember you, or that a similar approach will work on another day.

Sometimes people with dementia may become aggressive or even violent with no warning. In these situations, immediately remove yourself from the room, and report the incident to your supervisor and others who may need to know about it.

## Suggested discussion points

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- What were the key safety messages of this module?
  - Leave a situation when you don't feel safe.
  - A person's chart may not tell the whole story.
  - What has worked in the past or for others may not work at this time for you.
  - Always report incidents to your supervisor and others.
- What did the caregiver do to keep herself safe?
  - Asked her co-worker questions.
  - Read the care plan.
  - Continually evaluated the person and situation.
  - Backed out of the room.
  - Reported the incident.
  - Had the incident documented.
- What else could have been done to avoid conflict with the resident?
- In what other situations does a caregiver enter someone's personal space?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation?
- How does your workplace ensure that all workers — especially casual workers — are safe?

## Module 2:

### I want to go home!



#### How to distract and redirect

People with dementia may behave in ways that are potentially unsafe, such as trying to leave their residence. To stop these behaviours safely, caregivers should validate any concerns they have, and distract them from the behaviour by asking probing questions, redirecting the conversation, and providing choices of other things they can do. Touching the person or grabbing their cane or walker may trigger an aggressive reaction as this action may be perceived as an invasion of their personal space.

## Suggested discussion points

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- What were the key safety messages of this module?
  - Know the person and what type of redirection might work in this situation.
  - Avoid physical intervention such as grabbing or pulling.
  - Have a range of options available for possible redirections.
- What could have happened if the caregiver had tried to physically prevent the resident from leaving?
- What else could have been done to avoid conflict with the resident?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation?
- What distraction or redirection techniques do you use that have worked?
- How are successful techniques shared with your co-workers?

## Module 3:

### Only fools rush in



### Stop and assess

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When caring for a person with dementia, situations will arise that initially appear urgent, but are not. In any situation, it is important to stay calm and take time to evaluate what has occurred. Never rush in without a plan, and make sure your plan involves others who can help.

## Suggested discussion points

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- What were the key safety messages of this module?
  - Don't rush into a situation — evaluate, plan, and then act.
  - Be flexible in your approach.
  - Be empathic and respectful — preserve dignity and self-esteem.
- What did the caregivers do to keep themselves safe?
  - Kept calm.
  - Evaluated the situation before jumping into solutions.
  - Developed a plan, and worked as a team.
- What could have happened if the caregivers rushed in to assist George?
- In what other situations could caregivers respond with this approach? (Example: A resident is found on the floor.)
- What else could have been done under these circumstances to avoid an unsafe situation?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation? What approach did you take? Did it work? If so, why?

## Module 4:

### It's okay to walk away



#### When doing all the right stuff doesn't work

Like everyone else, a person with dementia will have good days and bad days. When providing care for people with dementia, it is important to continuously monitor their responses to what you are doing. If a person becomes agitated, stop immediately, and evaluate the situation.

If your approach is not working, either modify your approach or walk away and report to your supervisor so the person can be reassessed. It may be that the person is in pain and needs to be reassessed, or they just may not want to do that particular activity at that time. It is also important to be culturally sensitive, and explore ways to provide culturally competent care.

## Suggested discussion points

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- What were the key safety messages of this module?
  - Be flexible — don't force the situation.
  - Remain calm and respectful.
- What did the caregivers do to keep themselves safe?
  - Re-evaluated the situation.
  - Stopped and listened to the resident's needs.
  - Reported the situation to their supervisor.
- What could have happened if the caregivers did not walk away?
- What else could have been done under these circumstances to avoid an unsafe situation?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation? What did you do that worked?
- How does your workplace incorporate flexibility into the daily care of residents?

## Module 5:

### Bath time



#### Easing the stress

Bath time can be quite stressful for people with dementia. There are a few simple things that you can do to reduce the stress. It is important to maintain the person's dignity, minimize any discomfort such as being cold, and encourage the person to do as much of their own care as possible.

If there is any indication that the person is becoming anxious or panicked, stop and re-evaluate the situation. Explore alternative options for maintaining personal hygiene or bathing. Share with others what works well. Know the person's social history so this personal information can be used to distract and reassure the person.

## Suggested discussion points

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- What were the key safety messages of this module?
  - Know and use good bathing practices.
  - Individualize bathing plans.
- What did the caregiver do to keep herself safe?
  - Engaged the resident by talking to her calmly.
  - Encouraged the resident to participate by washing herself.
  - Kept the resident warm.
  - Let the resident wear a gown.
  - Took the time to listen to the resident, and acknowledged her discomfort.
- What could have happened if the caregiver did not act in this manner?
- What else could have been done under these circumstances to avoid an unsafe situation?

# WorkSafeBC Prevention

## Information Line

The WorkSafeBC Prevention Information Line can answer your questions about workplace health and safety as well as worker and employer responsibilities, and can help you report a workplace accident/incident. The Prevention Information Line accepts anonymous calls.

Phone 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland, or call 1.888.621.7233 toll-free in British Columbia.

To report after-hours and weekend safety and health emergencies, call 1.866.922.4357 toll-free in British Columbia.

# Resources

## Online resources

At [worksafebc.com/healthcare](https://worksafebc.com/healthcare) you will find important information and resources on topics specific to health care and social services for employers and workers. Resources include books, bulletins, posters, and videos, as well as industry statistics.

## Enews updates

The health care and social service enews is sent out monthly and highlights injury prevention, with resources focusing on patient handling, violence, dementia, infectious diseases, and general health and safety. Additional information in enews includes notifications of changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation and guidelines and event listings (including conferences and workshops).

## Contact us

Email us at: [indlabsr@worksafebc.com](mailto:indlabsr@worksafebc.com)

To view or download videos and resources, and sign up for enews, visit [worksafebc.com/healthcare](https://worksafebc.com/healthcare)