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# Residential Care Options: Visiting Someone in Dementia Care

By Family Caregiver Alliance

## When someone has just moved into a dementia community

- During the first two weeks, visit often and stay as long as you want.
  - If the facility has a policy of not allowing visitors for the first two weeks during the adjustment period, consider whether this is the right facility for you.
- Announce yourself to your loved one: “Hi mom, it’s me, Susan.”
- Introduce yourself to the staff.
- Bring favorite foods. Decorate the room with familiar objects.
  - Add flowers, plants, pictures of family/friends, artwork.
  - Make a large poster with family pictures from the past and hang it in the room.
- If your loved one is agitated about the move, have a story you use consistently about why he or she has to stay there “for a little while.” These are “fiblets.”
  - “The house is being painted and I don’t want you to smell the fumes.”
  - “I need to have a minor medical procedure and I can’t

take care of you while I am recovering.”

- “I am having some termite work done on the house.”
- “The city is fixing the sewer.”
- If this does not divert the person’s attention, change the subject and discuss the latest ball game, the weather, politics, the grandchildren, etc.
- Play games such as cards, dominoes, or whatever the person used to do.
- Watch TV together. Listen or sing along to music.
- Respond to “I want to go home.” This is usually a way of saying “I am not comfortable”—it is not about the physical home, which is how we hear it.
- Say “Tell me about your home” or “What’s your favorite thing at home?”

## After two weeks or so, start to wean yourself and your loved one

- Visit every other day instead of every day, eventually go every third day.
- Make a mental list of things to talk about, as your loved one won’t have information to share with you.
- Bring treats to eat.
- Learn the schedule and visit during “free time” rather than activity time.
- Take your loved one for walks around the facility, particularly in the garden, if they have one.
- Bring photo albums to look through, or a tablet or cel phone to visit Facebook to share pictures and stories of family and friends.

- If you know someone else has visited, remind your loved one that they came.
- Shorten your visits. The person with dementia usually doesn't remember if you have been there for five minutes or five hours. Ultimately it's better to visit three times per week for 20 minutes than once a week for an hour.
- Do not go on outings until your loved one is totally adjusted to their living situation, and then only if you think it would be helpful and not confusing.
- Come with a friend or someone else who knows the person. Remind your loved one who this other person is.
- Bring videos that you would like to watch and watch them together, particularly comedies and old movies. Even if he/she can't follow the story, they can often enjoy the experience, and you can hold hands or sit close and feel connected during this time.

## Resources

### **Family Caregiver Alliance**

#### **National Center on Caregiving**

(415) 434-3388 | (800) 445-8106

Website: [www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)

Email: [info@caregiver.org](mailto:info@caregiver.org)

FCA CareNav: <https://fca.cacrc.org/login>

Services by State: <https://www.caregiver.org/connecting-caregivers/services-by-state/>

Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA) seeks to improve the quality of life for caregivers through education, services, research, and advocacy. Through its National Center on Caregiving, FCA offers information on current social, public policy, and caregiving issues and provides assistance in the development of public and private programs for caregivers. For residents of the greater San Francisco Bay Area, FCA provides direct support services for caregivers of those with Alzheimer's disease, stroke, traumatic brain injury, Parkinson's, and other debilitating disorders that strike adults.

## Residential Care Options: Five Tip Sheets

1. [The Right Time](#)
  2. [Housing Options](#)
  3. [Choosing the Right Place](#)
  4. [Caregiving Doesn't End When Your Loved One Moves](#)
  5. Visiting Someone in Dementia Care
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