

October 24, 2025
Court Visitor Training

Advocating for People with Dementia

Understanding the best
interests of someone living
with cognitive changes



Objectives

1

Understand the difference between signs of dementia and typical age-related changes

2

Communicate effectively with people living with dementia

3

Understand cognitive changes by talking with family members and friends

4

Advocate with medical providers for diagnosis

5

Access a range of tools to assist with decision-making and quality of life

- Meet Diane.
- Her daughter Juli is Diane's financial Power of Attorney.
- In total her assets are worth about \$4 million.
 - Her will specifies that all assets will go to her two daughters.
- She pays her son-in-law's father, Denzil Nelson, to do tasks on her farm.

- Diane is married to and lives with Denzil.
- Under Denzil's direction, she updated her will so that Denzil is the sole beneficiary.
 - Denzil has very little in savings or assets.
- Denzil is now her Power of Attorney.
- She has stopped talking to her two daughters, all but cutting them out of her life.



2 years
Dementia
diagnosis



Is it Dementia or Typical Aging?

The 10 warning signs



Words NOT to Use



- Dementia patient
- Demented
- Dementing illness
- Affliction
- Victim/sufferer
- Senile/senile dementia
- Slang expressions that are derogatory (“not all there”)
- Burden/burden of caring

What is Dementia?

Types of Dementia

Symptoms

- Memory loss
- Mood changes
- Language issues
- Trouble with problem solving

Diseases

- Alzheimer's
- Vascular
- Lewy body
- Frontotemporal
- Mixed dementia



Warning Signs



1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life

2. Challenges in planning or solving problems

3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks

4. Confusion with time or place

5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships

6. New problems with words in speaking or writing

7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps

8. Decreased or poor judgment

9. Withdrawal from work or social activities

10. Changes in mood and personality

Typical Aging Changes

1. Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later

2. Making occasional errors when managing finances

3. Occasionally needing help to record a TV show

4. Confusion about the day of the week, but figuring it out

5. Vision changes related to cataracts

6. Sometimes having trouble finding the right word

7. Misplacing things and being able to retrace steps

8. Making a mistake occasionally

9. Sometimes feeling uninterested in social events

10. Having specific routines and feeling annoyed when they are disrupted

Warning Signs

- You are looking for **changes** in a person's behavior
- Dementia is not a normal part of aging
- The warning signs can look different
- If you see changes, it's best to get a cognitive assessment



Is it Dementia?

Communicating with the
person living with dementia



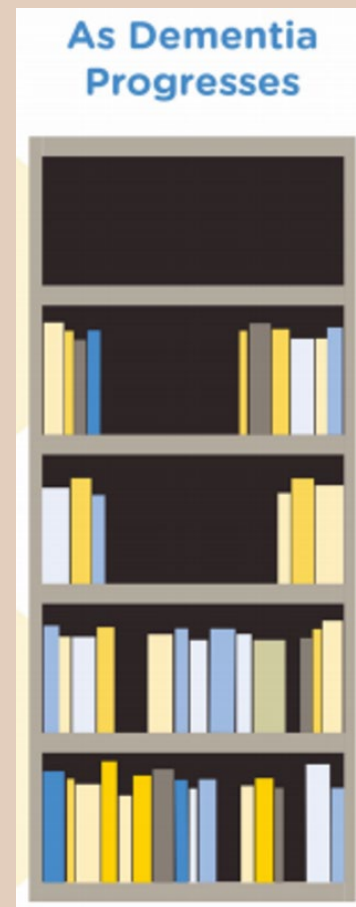
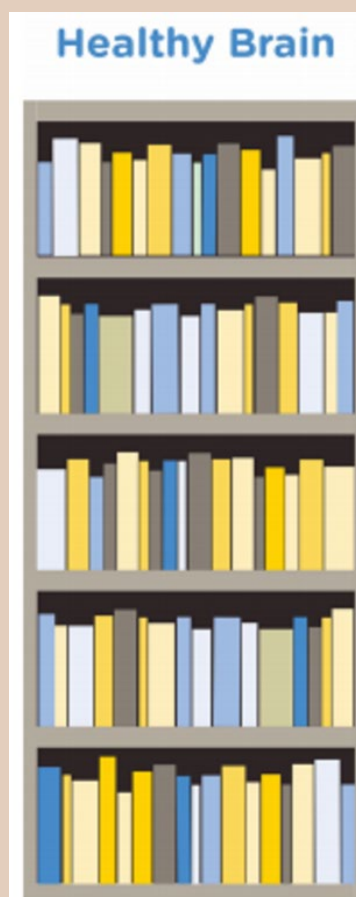
Dementia Changes Communication



Someone with dementia might:

- Take longer to find the right words
- Repeat familiar words, stories or questions
- Forget what they were talking about in the middle of a sentence
- Speak less often
- Use more hand gestures

Strength-Based Communication



Communicating Effectively

Three golden rules:

- 1. Be aware of your feelings**
- 2. Be respectful**
- 3. Join them in their reality**

Connect and redirect



Communicating Effectively



Other tips:

- **Ask fewer questions**
 - *It seems like your daughter is very supportive.*
- **Ask closed-ended questions**
 - *Would you like to live in a long-term care facility or with a family member?*
- **Be direct and concise**
 - *I need to talk to your doctor. What doctor do you see?*
- **Answer questions like it's the first time**
- **Allow more space in the conversation**

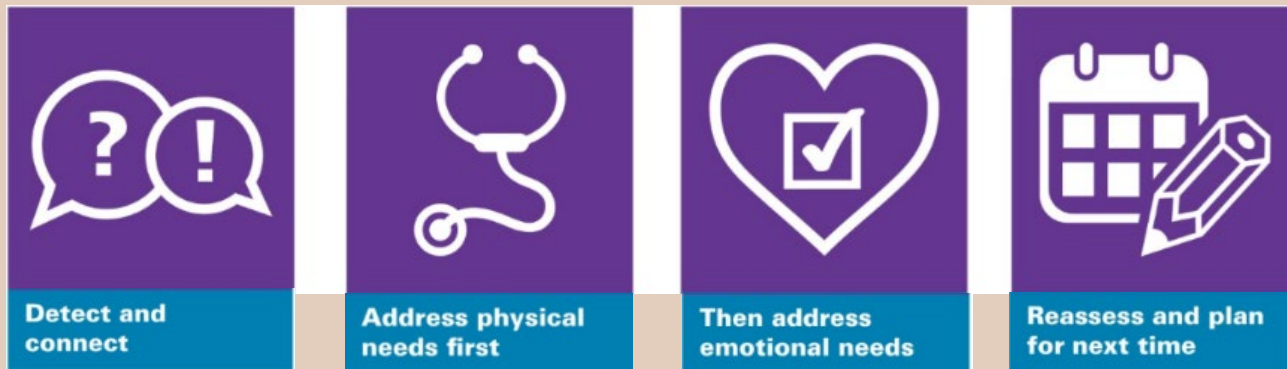
Communicating Effectively

Other tips are to:

- **Provide visual prompts and name objects**
 - *"Let's finish this paperwork" instead of "You need to do this"*
- **Use positives instead of negatives**
 - *"It would help me to finish our talk" instead of "Don't go outside"*
- **Be aware of your tone and body language**
- **Use humor**



Behavior is Communication



- Join the person in their reality
- Try to understand context
- Connect with their feelings

- Look at medical issues, including pain
- Physical concerns, like hunger
- Environmental factors, like lighting

- Focus on feelings, not facts
- Reinforce that they are safe and you are there to help

- What went well? What didn't?
- How can you adjust for next time?
- Not a guilt trip!

Cognitive Assessment Tools



Mini-Cog®

Mini-Cog



MEMORY IMPAIRMENT SCREEN (MIS)

**Memory
Impairment
Screen (MIS)**



MINI MENTAL STATE
EXAMINATION
(MMSE)

**Mini-Mental
State
Examination
(MMSE)**



MoCA
COGNITION

**Montreal
Cognitive
Assessment
(MoCA)**



SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

**St Louis
University
Mental Status
Exam (SLUMS)**



Cognitive Assessment Tools

Mini-Cog

3 minutes

No decline \geq
3-4/5

Easy for a
layperson to
administer

Clock
Word Recall

MIS

<5 minutes

No decline \geq
5/8

No executive
function or
visuospatial

Word recall and
categorization
only

MMSE

5-10 minutes

No decline \geq
25/30

Minimal
training, very
widely used

Recall, orientation,
attention,
calculation,
language and praxis
(naming, repetition,
reading)

MoCA

10 minutes

No decline \geq
to 26/30

Assesses executive
function, multiple
languages

Visuospatial and
executive function,
naming, memory,
attention, language,
abstraction,
orientation, recall

SLUMS

5-10 minutes

No decline \geq
to 27/30

Assesses executive
function, multiple
languages

Orientation, word
recall, calculation,
naming, attention,
clock,
identification,
comprehension

Recommended

Is it Dementia?

Talking with **family members
and friends**



Types of Care Partners

- Primary care partner(s)
 - Oversee PLWD's health and wellness at home
 - Monitor symptoms, activities, response to treatment
- Helper care partner
 - Monitor primary care partner's health
 - Offer assistance and respite
- Long-distance care partner
 - Make appointments
 - Manage finances, health insurance, healthcare, etc.
 - Gather resources



Anosognosia

- Anosognosia: unawareness of disease
- Stigma → denial
 - Person living with dementia
 - Care partner
 - Family/friends



Questions to Ask Friends, Neighbors and Family

- What changes have you noticed?
- What else has been going on (medically, socially, etc.)?
- Has anyone else noticed changes?
- Have you spoken with the person about your concerns?
- Use the warning signs as your guide



Is it Dementia?

Advocating for a respondent
with **medical providers**



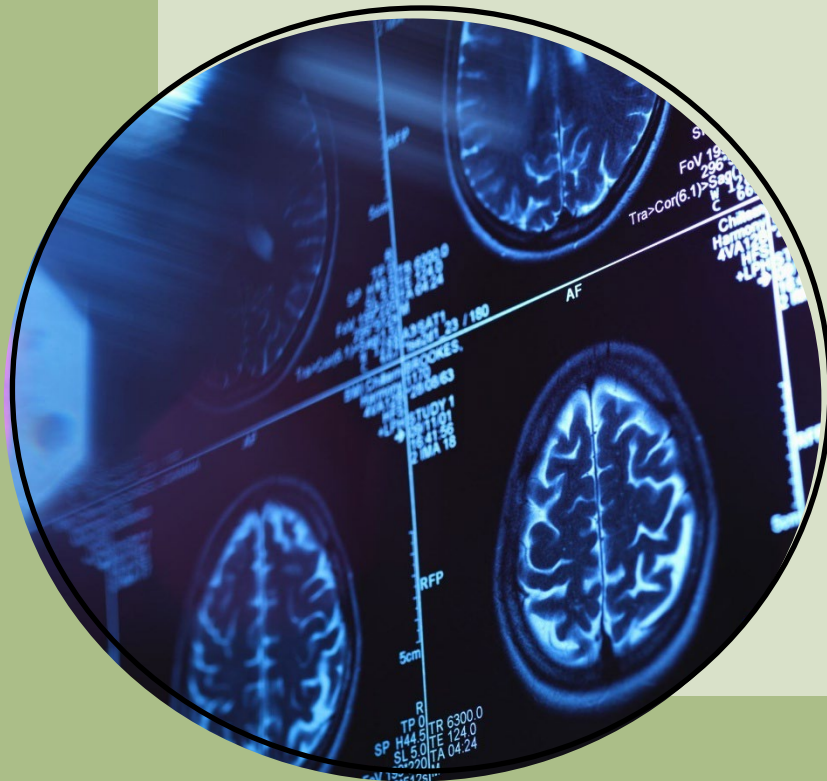
Dementia Mimics

- Hypothyroidism
- Medication interactions
- Vitamin deficiencies
- Infections
- Mental health conditions (depression)
- Brain tumors
- Fluid in the brain
- Stroke



Dementia Tests

- Blood tests
 - New blood test, Lumipulse
 - Not yet covered by Medicare
- MRI/other imaging
- Neurological exam
- Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) tests



Diagnosis Process



Gather
Information



Primary Care
Provider



Neurologist or
Neuropsychologist



Mental Health
Professional



Imaging



Testing



Connect
with
Supports

Resources

Providers

- [Clinical Provider Practice Tool](#) – Short, practical
- [Dementia Care Plan and Clinical Tool Beyond Diagnosis](#) – For treatment after diagnosis
- [Cognitive Assessment Toolkit](#) – Comprehensive, but long

Care Partners

- [Partnering with Your Healthcare Provider](#)
- [Log Sheets](#)
- Calling provider beforehand
- Advocating in the office



What Tools Can I Use?

State, local and national
dementia resources



Resources

Care Partner Support

- [Aging & Long Term Care of Eastern Washington](#)
 - One-on-one caregiver support
 - Assistance with behaviors
 - Caregiver workshops
- [Legal Planning Toolkit](#) (English and Spanish)
- [Dementia Road Map](#) (English, Spanish, Russian)
 - Free assistance with powers of attorney and healthcare directives
- [Caregiver Tip Sheets](#) (English, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese)
- [Alzheimer's Association](#)
 - Support groups
 - 24/7 helpline
 - Memory Cafés
 - MyAlzJourney
- [The Conversation Project](#) and [Five Wishes](#)

Contact Information

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Thank you!