

Unlocking Lockdown: how to support people with memory loss and dementia

Three weeks into 'Lockdown' and I've been thinking about how this experience might be affecting people living with dementia who are still at home, and the people who are sharing their house or flat with them. Dementia affects everyone differently, but there are some things which are likely to be especially challenging for people in this situation. I've tried to acknowledge this and to think of ideas which might help.

We are all anxious and uncertain about what is happening around us at the moment. A person with dementia may not know what is going on but will probably be aware that things are different. Even when people no longer recognise the faces of people they know well, often they can still read facial expressions and tell how someone is feeling. It will really help to be as positive and upbeat as you can (without feeling you've got to have a permanent grin on your face!)

People living with dementia are often aware that they are not as able as once they were, and this can make them feel low and anxious. When they feel like this, the things that can make them hard to be around (for example, repeating the same question, or being a bit 'ratty') are likely to be more pronounced. When the person living with dementia feels at ease, the whole household can be at ease.

I remember how hard it was for me to finally get the message that there is no point in arguing with someone who has dementia, even when you know fine well that they are **wrong!** One of the most helpful things someone told me was to 'try to get into your mum's world – there is no way you are going to be able to drag her into yours'. 'Getting into another person's world' sounds hard, but there are lots of resources around that can help with this. I'm going to focus on things which are **free**, but they do rely on having access to technology.

Music is something which resonates with us throughout our lives: we respond to it from before we are born until the very end of our lives. Typically, the music we enjoyed when we were in our late teens and early twenties keeps a special significance for us. The BBC has a fantastic website called **Music Memories** <https://musicmemories.bbcrewind.co.uk/> which is really easy to use. It will play popular songs and music from the decade of your choice. Setting the scene with music associated with a happy time in the past can really help to create and maintain a contented mood. There is also a national radio station called BBC2 50s which plays music from the 1950s <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/lfsxC11Rjlpn1kDfNxYBc/how-to-listen-to-radio-2-50s> You need to have a digital radio to be able to find it.

Listening to music is great; joining in is even better and has proven benefits for mental and physical health. If you can download Zoom (www.zoom.us) you could join the wonderful **Sofa Singers** and be part of a huge, worldwide choir from your home.

The BBC also has a fantastic website called **RemArc** <https://remarc.bbcrewind.co.uk/index.html> which is full of old and much-loved TV programmes, theme tunes and advertisements. You can choose a **Theme** or a **Decade** for some very happy reminiscing. It's very easy to use and, I can confirm, is a lovely way to spend time with some old favourites.

Liverpool Museums developed their **House of Memories** programme <https://houseofmemories.co.uk/> in consultation with people living with dementia and this is the resource we used for our EVOKE reminiscence project. You will need to download the app onto a tablet computer or an iPad. We worked with the House of Memories team to create our own Gloucestershire package – so you will find lots of pictures and short films from around the county. People living with dementia can often become withdrawn because they lose the confidence to participate. *House of Memories* works by sparking memories and stories about familiar things, places and experiences.

Moving about is important for all of us, and we are all having to be creative about how to stay fit when we can't get out much. A person living with dementia can sometimes have a restless kind of energy which makes it difficult for them to settle down. Joe Wicks, the P.E. teacher you always wanted, has devised a safe and simple workout to help older people keep moving: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0873kvz> Doing some exercise can release 'feel good' chemicals into the brain and there is nothing to suggest that this isn't also true for people living with dementia.

Art and culture

The National Trust has made many of its treasures available to learn about online: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/spring-into-our-collections>. They've also got recipes and craft ideas to have a look at. In fact, most galleries and museums have come up with some ingenious ways of allowing us to visit from our sofas, so it's well worth having a look if that's your cup of tea. Talking of tea, it's important to stay hydrated to keep the old grey cells topped up.

Brain work

Jigidi <https://www.jigidi.com/> is a fantastic on-line jigsaw site where you can create your own jigsaws from favourite images and solve jigsaws created by people all over the world. It's easy, fun and pretty addictive! A few of us have had a go and we are hooked. If you'd like to do some jigsaws created from images in our collections, just search for heritage hub in the keywords.

I'd like to finish this by saying a couple of things which don't get said enough in my opinion:

- Even in less uncertain times, it is challenging to live with dementia.
- Even in less uncertain times, it is challenging to live with somebody who is living with dementia, especially if you love that person.

Give yourself a break, try to take pleasure in small things. You are dealing with something difficult and deserve nothing but respect and admiration. I hope you find something helpful here.

Kate O'Keefe - Dementia Lead and Alzheimer's Society Dementia Champion.