



The
**Dementia
Society**
Ottawa and Renfrew County

EXPLAINING COVID-19 TO SOMEONE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA



The COVID-19 pandemic poses unique challenges. This is true for people living with dementia and caregivers. A person with dementia may have questions about COVID-19. They may become upset or confused about the global situation. Communicating with the person you are caring for can help them feel safe.

Changing the way we explain things is important because:

- A global pandemic is complicated. Dementia can affect the person's ability to think about complex topics.
- Memory changes can make it harder for the person to learn and remember new information.
- Dementia can affect a person's ability to understand language.

Things to consider:

- **What they need to know:** Consider the reasons for telling the person about COVID-19. Are they asking questions about it? Are they leaving the house often? Would information be helpful?
- **The person's level of understanding:** In the early stages of dementia, the person might be able to understand the situation. Their level of education and life experiences can also affect their understanding. You may need to adjust the amount of information you give to match their ability.
- **Your own emotions:** Make sure you are calm and able to provide reassurance to the person. If you are feeling upset, they may become upset too.

Tips for communicating:

- **Simplify:** Keep sentences short and use common words. For example, you might want to use the word “flu” instead of “virus.”
- **Shift the blame:** When it comes to social distancing, mask wearing, or hand washing, make sure you are not the one “making the rules.” Instead, let them know that these are the Doctor’s orders.
- **Be consistent:** Everyone in their support system should give the same information.
- **Reassure:** You are in this together. Try saying “I wish things were different” or “I don’t like this either” to acknowledge their feelings.
- **Identity the emotion:** For example, if the person feels upset that you can’t visit, avoid explanations. Say “I really miss you too” or “I am sorry it’s been so long.”
- **Change the subject:** The person might ask repetitive questions or become distressed. Try to focus on something else. You might say, “I enjoyed the lunches we used to have together. Did you enjoy your lunch today?”
- **Don’t argue:** If you are feeling frustrated, it’s okay to change the subject or leave the room.
- **Use humour:** The world is a strange place right now. The person might find masks or face coverings look odd. If they feel silly, you can laugh with them.
- **Take care of yourself:** The COVID-19 situation and the person’s symptoms of dementia are out of your control. Focus your energy and attention on things that you can control. Seek help from your support system when you need it.

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 | DementiaHelp.ca

To learn more about COVID-19, visit <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/novel-coronavirus.aspx>