



LEISURE AND FRIENDSHIP: A CONVERSATION GUIDE

SUMMARY

The purpose of this conversation guide is to provide tips and strategies that people living with dementia and their friends can use to commit to their friendships in meaningful ways.

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How To Use This Conversation Guide

This resource is for people who have friends living with dementia, people with dementia themselves, family members, and anyone working in dementia care. By using the strategies included here, we hope that you can create supportive spaces within your relationships to both honour and continue your long-term commitment to your friendship. These strategies allow friends to acknowledge that, despite changes in memory and behaviour, someone living with dementia is a person who has thoughts, feelings, and strengths. Support from friends helps to ensure mutually enjoyable experiences are maintained.

Not all the recommendations will be relevant for every friendship, so use what makes sense to you to help maintain your relationship. Regardless of how things may change or stay the same, continuing to build deep bonds can bring laughter, joy, and meaning to your lives.

Before you get started, here is a suggestion on how to use this information to support your continued friendship. Start by watching one or more of the three videos on our website: www.dementiaandfriendship.ca

These videos highlight the gifts and meanings of friendships, the role of leisure, and strategies for maintaining friendships. After watching each video, use the accompanying guide that contains related tips and questions to engage in a guided conversation with your friend.

Consider When, Where and How

An important consideration before starting a conversation about your friendship is when, where and how to proceed. For example, it is valuable to think about when to have a conversation. Should it be scheduled or spontaneous? Where to talk is just as important. Should you ask your friend questions in a public or private setting? Equally important is how. Should you discuss all the questions at once or over a period time?

Here are some examples of DOs and DON'Ts for when, where and how to sustain friendship in dementia:

WHEN:

- ✓ DO You're enjoying a beverage in the clubhouse after a round of golf and you ask your friend, "Can we take a few minutes to talk about our friendship?"
- ✗ DON'T You are playing the front 9 at a nearby golf course. Your friend is getting ready to tee off and you ask, "How can we maintain our friendship?"

In the second scenario, your friend may be too distracted while focusing on the ball to have a deep conversation. When you engage in these conversations, it is recommended that you choose a time when you don't have to focus on anything else. The conversation will flow better in the first scenario.

WHERE:

- ✓ DO You're taking a drive in the country enjoying a relaxing time together and you ask, "What makes our friendship meaningful to you?"
- ✗ DON'T You're in a busy restaurant having dinner and catching up with each other and you ask, "What makes our friendship meaningful to you?"

Although having a meal or coffee with your friend can be a leisure activity you enjoy together, it may also be noisy and hard to hear each other in the second scenario. Difficulty tuning out other sounds and conversations may make it more challenging to focus on your conversation.

HOW:

- ✓ DO You make plans to meet your friend at the park to go over the questions. After every 3 - 4 questions, you check in to see if your friend would like to continue or if they need a break.

X DON'T You make plans to meet your friend at the park to go over the questions. After a couple hours, your friend seems tired, but you press on because you want to know everything you can to support your friend.

Although it is not surprising that you want to take every opportunity to find out how you can support your friend, don't put pressure on each other to talk about everything all at once. It is important to be a good listener and understand what your friend needs from you. Together you may choose to focus on only a couple questions as others may not be relevant to you.

A Conversation Guide for Leisure and Friendship

The following guide is focused on leisure and friendship. It also includes tips on having conversations with your friend and questions to help you get started. Additionally, at the end of this guide you will find a “pocket” conversation starter including tips for more specific conversations that you can download and print for use during your chats.

Tips for Starting a Conversation:

- Give permission for your friend to ask questions; some people may find it difficult to start a conversation, and this may provide an opening
- Start conversations early, soon after a diagnosis
- Be open and honest with each other
- Put your trust in one another; promise to keep your conversations private
- Be empathetic and compassionate; listen actively and do not correct or criticize
- Do not assume what others are thinking even though you may have been friends for years and there may be certain expectations with long-term friends
- Friends may need to take initiative to have conversations
- Try to have in-person conversations so you can pick up on body language and intentions
- You may want to sit side-by-side to reduce anxiety, like sitting on a park bench
- Go to a familiar place to have your conversation; it may reduce anxiety and create a sense of safety

The most important thing is to be flexible and keep our ‘Tips for Starting a Conversation’ in mind. It is also important to consider the situation and timing of engaging in these discussions. Sometimes all a friend wants is your company.

Leisure and Friendship

Shared leisure interests are the basis for connection and time spent together. Leisure is also instrumental for helping friendships endure despite changes and challenges brought about by dementia. Shared leisure interests can help sustain friendships when friends adopt strategies to maintain their leisure engagement. Continued leisure engagement requires shared efforts. Everyone is unique and may enjoy different activities at different times. Continue talking about your likes and dislikes.

Here is a list of activities that may spark your shared leisure interests: use electronics/technology, listen to music, play sports, watch kids play sports, play cards, do something artistic, do something active like walking or swimming, go for dinner or coffee, watch a movie, visit a museum, dance, take Tai chi, talk and catch up about everyday things and common interests, watch sports on television, volunteer together, etc.

Consider trying a new activity together!

Tips to help sustain friendships through shared leisure interest:

- Determine where your shared interests lie and consider engaging in a shared leisure activity
- Look for organized and casual leisure opportunities if your friend lives in a long-term care home or a retirement community (e.g., go to a music program together if you both enjoy music; spend time looking at photos together)
- Look for community-based leisure programs that interest you both
- Engage in familiar pastimes and go to familiar places
- Establish routines but also be open to trying something new
- Pay attention to how your friend responds to an activity. This will indicate whether you should do it again
- Ask your friend what they want to do. However, try to avoid too many open-ended questions (“Where would you like to go to talk?”); rather, provide options (“Would you like to go for a coffee? We could go to the café you like by your house.”)
- Check in with each other regularly to ensure you are both on the same page about your leisure preferences

Questions to help sustain friendships through shared leisure interests:

1. How can we support each other to continue to make use of our skills and strengths?
2. Can we both share a time when we enjoyed ourselves doing a leisure activity?
3. Are there other people we like spending time with?
4. Do you like group activities or individual activities? Are there any exceptions (i.e., important celebrations that need to be acknowledged)?
5. Looking ahead, should we continue doing the same thing or should we mix it up? How so?
6. How can we support each other to continue enjoying the leisure activities that are meaningful to us? Are there any adaptations we could incorporate?
7. What stops each of us from participating in leisure activities (i.e., transportation, money, supplies, medications, other chronic conditions or underlying health issues)?
8. What causes each of us stress or to stop enjoying a leisure activity?
9. What are the best times and days to enjoy activities (i.e., morning, afternoon, weekday, weekend)? Are there exceptions?
10. Do we need to schedule something in advance, or can we be spontaneous (i.e., need time to prepare, or get more rest the day before)?

Conversations for Discussing Friendship and Dementia Cue Cards



Conversation Starter

Questions to help sustain friendships
through shared leisure

1. How can we support each other to continue to make use of our skills and strengths?
2. Can we both share a time when we enjoyed ourselves doing a leisure activity?
3. Are there other people we like spending time with?
4. Do you like group activities or individual activities? Are there any exceptions (i.e., important celebrations that need to be acknowledged)?
5. Looking ahead, should we continue doing the same thing or should we mix it up? How so?
6. How can we support each other to continue enjoying the leisure activities that are meaningful to us? Are there any adaptations we could incorporate?
7. What stops each of us from participating in leisure activities (i.e., transportation, money, supplies, medications, other chronic conditions or underlying health issues)?
8. What causes each of us stress or to stop enjoying a leisure activity?
9. What are the best times and days to enjoy activities (i.e., morning, afternoon, weekday, weekend)? Are there exceptions?
10. Do we need to schedule something in advance (need time to prepare, or get more rest the day before) or can we be spontaneous?



10 tips for a general conversation

1. Give permission for your friend to ask questions; some people may find it difficult to start a conversation, and this may provide an opening.
2. Start conversations early, soon after a diagnosis.
3. Be open and honest with each other.
4. Put your trust in one another; promise to keep your conversations private.
5. Be empathetic and compassionate; listen actively and do not correct or criticize.
6. Do not assume what others are thinking even though you may have been friends for years and there may be certain expectations with older friends.
7. Friends may need to take initiative to have conversations.
8. Try to have in-person conversations so you can pick up on body language and intentions.
9. You may want to sit side-by-side to reduce anxiety, like sitting on a park bench.
10. Go to a familiar place to have your conversation; it may reduce anxiety and create a sense of safety.

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