



Dementia Friendly Libraries

Libraries support learning, connection and belonging for people of all ages. This Dementia Friendly America Sector Guide outlines practical actions that librarians, support staff and volunteers can take to provide supportive and accessible experiences for people living with dementia and their care partners, with simple steps to strengthen communication, improve signage and adapt programs and collections.

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

Dementia is a general term used to describe a group of symptoms that affect memory, thinking, communication and decision-making in ways that interfere with daily life. It is not a normal part of aging. Common symptoms include memory loss, confusion, trouble finding words, difficulty planning or solving problems and changes in mood or behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. Other types include Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia and Frontotemporal Dementia.

In libraries, dementia may make it harder to locate materials, use self-checkout or navigate stacks and computer areas.

BUILD DEMENTIA AWARENESS

Provide dementia-awareness training for all staff and volunteers through programs such as Dementia Friends or invite local experts to lead educational sessions or workshops.

Integrate dementia education into staff and volunteer orientation, annual training and professional development programs.

Support employees who are providing care to someone with dementia by offering flexible scheduling, access to employee assistance programs or referrals to resources like the Eldercare Locator and the Alzheimer's Association Helpline.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND RESPECTFULLY

Engage the person before speaking. Make eye contact, smile and address them warmly (for example, "Hello there" or "Good morning") before continuing the conversation.

Speak slowly and clearly. Use short, simple sentences with one idea at a time.

Use a warm, friendly tone of voice. Be calm, positive and respectful.

Smile and be kind. Friendly expressions help the person feel safe and supported.

Ask one question at a time. Offer simple choices, like yes/no or "Would you like to look at this book or that one?"

Give the person extra time to respond. Pause and wait patiently—avoid rushing or finishing sentences.

Repeat or rephrase if something is not understood. Use simple words or shorter phrases to support understanding.

Reduce distractions. Minimize background noise so it is easier to focus.

Pay attention to non-verbal cues. Watch for signs of confusion, stress or discomfort and respond calmly and supportively.

IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Provide large-print, high-contrast signs. Use simple words and familiar icons (e.g. restrooms, exits, check-out, information desk) placed at eye level to guide patrons.

Keep floors safe and dry. Avoid shiny or patterned floors that can cause glare or confusion and mark stairs or ramps with bright, high-contrast tape or paint.

Keep lighting bright and even in all areas, especially hallways and restrooms. Reduce glare and shadows to help people see clearly and feel safe moving around.

Provide comfortable, stable seating that is easy to get in and out of. Place sturdy chairs with armrests in reading areas, near entrances and exits.

Make restrooms easy to find and safe to use. Post clear signs and maintain bright, even lighting. Install grab bars and offer single-use or family restrooms when possible.

Keep pathways open and uncluttered. Maintain wide aisles, stable shelving and clear sightlines to entrances and service desks.

Help patrons recognize staff. Encourage large, readable name badges or lanyards and warm, proactive greetings.

Support wayfinding. Use color-coded signs, “You Are Here” maps and offer help when someone appears lost or unsure.

ADAPT LIBRARY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Create calm visiting times. Designate “quiet” or “relaxed” hours with soft lighting, minimal noise, and additional staff support to make visits less stressful.

Simplify policies and communication. Offer flexible due dates and waived fines for patrons with memory loss.

Circulate Memory or Activity Kits. Provide themed kits with tactile, sensory, or nostalgic materials for patrons and care partners to enjoy at home.

Expand dementia-friendly materials. Build collections with large-print books, adult picture books, short stories, and nostalgic or local-history titles.

Host dementia-friendly programs. Offer creative engagement such as Memory Cafes, shared-reading groups, or TimeSlips storytelling—available in person and virtually.

PROMOTE AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Educate the public. Create reading lists and exhibits on brain health, memory, and healthy aging.

Raise visibility. Host dementia-awareness events during observances such as Alzheimer’s & Brain Awareness Month (June) or National Family Caregivers Month (November).

Collaborate locally. Partner with health and aging organizations to co-host talks, resource fairs, or workshops on brain health, caregiving, and risk reduction.

Engage the profession. Join the ALA Alzheimer’s and Related Dementias Interest Group (IGARD) or similar networks to exchange best practices and sustain professional learning.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Become a Dementia Friend
dfamerica.org/become-a-dementia-friend/

Alzheimer’s Association Helpline
800-272-3900 | www.alz.org



Find or Start a Memory Cafe
dfamerica.org/

Eldercare Locator
800-677-1116 | eldercare.acl.gov



Scan or visit
dfamerica.org/resource-listing



Dementia Friendly America
is administered by **USAging**