**What is Dementia?**

Dementia is the name given to a collection of symptoms that occur when the brain becomes damaged through disease. The disease causes loss of brain cells and the brain subsequently reduces in size. The damage affects the way the brain functions and how a person responds and copes with daily living.

Dementias are usually progressive which means that they get worse and cannot be cured.

No two people will respond to dementia in the same way although there are similarities within each disease.

What happens with dementia?

As a result of the damage, people may experience problems with

* Memory loss, especially short term
* Thinking things through, concentrating
* Understanding instructions
* Identifying familiar places, people and things
* Using reason and judgment
* Some social situations
* Lack of inhibitions

If any of these things happen it can be frightening and frustrating. It can make someone anxious, unhappy and even angry. The world can seem a confusing and unfriendly place.

**Supporting people with Dementia – what can I do?**

* If memory is a problem – give tactful prompts about what day it is, what time of day and what you are going to do next.
* Try not to contradict the person, try to go with the flow and acknowledge what the person has said if it is incorrect.
* You both might find it enjoyable to share some happy memories. Photographs and other visuals can jog a memory. A person with short term memory may be able to remember things from long ago quite clearly.
* Questions starting with ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘how’, ‘who’ can be challenging so try to avoid them, along with those that require ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers.
* Listen closely not just with your ears, but notice body language and tone of voice etc.
* Keep things clear and simple in language.
* As dementia progresses the person may become less able to start a conversation, so you may have to take the initiative.

**Behaviour that challenges**

Sometimes people with dementia demonstrate behaviour that is challenging to those around them.

The more familiar we are with the people we are supporting than the more likely it is we will recognise certain behaviours and perhaps what triggers it.

Walking and Wandering – was walking a regular habit for them? Something they enjoyed? Can it continue?

Aggression – have a look for triggers and watch for signs of agitation. Are the person’s basic needs being met? They may be expressing a level of boredom of frustration.

Passive behaviour – try to include the person in day to day activities so they are not isolated.

You can find out more information and on line e learning resources at [www.scie.org.uk](http://www.scie.org.uk)

Certificates are not issued, but please do let the Volunteering Manager know if you complete this course and we can send you a Feedback learning review form before recording it in your records.