



Ways to Support a Person Living with Dementia in Decision-Making

The Canadian Centre for Elder Law's Dementia + Decision-Making project encompasses a range of resources designed to help caregivers, care partners and health care providers support people living with dementia to participate in decisions regarding their care and well-being. Please see www.bcli.org/ccel-projects/dementia-decision-making-project/ web page for a full list of materials and resources.

The journey of dementia is different for every person, including family and friend caregivers and care partners and the person living with dementia. Just as each person's experience is different, so are the decisions they need to make and the strategies that best support them. This information sheet addresses some of the ways that those giving support and care to a person living with dementia can encourage a person living with dementia in their decision-making.



The resources were developed with perspectives from caregivers, care partners, health care providers and people living with dementia. The full package of resources can be found on the CCEL **Dementia + Decision-Making** webpage www.bcli.org/ccel-projects/dementia-decision-making-project/

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To access **Dementia + Decision-Making**, use the QR code, or visit www.bcli.org/ccel-projects/dementia-decision-making-project/

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Dementia + Decision-Making
Empowering People Living with Dementia and Their Caregivers

Ways to Support a Person Living with Dementia in Decision-Making



CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ELDER LAW
BRITISH COLUMBIA LAW INSTITUTE

Ensure Legal Tools Are In Place

If you are the family or friend caregiver or care partner, it is important to be aware that there are legal tools available for a person living with dementia to choose a substitute decision-maker if they have a certain level of decision-making abilities. Learning about the legal tools available can help ensure that a person living with dementia is able to choose who and which decisions will be made for them when they cannot. Since the legal tools available are based on the needed capacity of the person living with dementia, it is important to have these conversations early in the journey. Refer to the “Overview of Consent Laws” section of our Information Booklet for more information on available legal tools.

Help to Narrow Choices Where Possible

When discussing the change in decision-making abilities, people living with dementia will experience changes in their ability to make decisions. Decreasing the number of options in a decision is helpful to encourage continued independence. For example, suggesting two different options for a meal rather than simply asking, “What do you want for dinner?” simplifies the decision. Limiting choices makes it easier and often quicker for a person living with dementia to decide.



Encourage Others to Speak Directly to the Person Living with Dementia

Sometimes health care professionals, service providers, and family or friends may speak to a support person instead of communicating with a person living with dementia because they think it could be faster or “easier”. Often people living with dementia feel overlooked or unimportant when health care professionals or others do not try to engage them in decisions about their care. People living with dementia still have the right to participate in decisions about their care and should be encouraged, and accommodated, to participate.



Write Things Down or Ask for Follow-Up

This can be as simple as writing down reminders of appointments and details about the appointment. It may also mean writing notes from appointments out for the person. When making decisions that are not urgent, you and the person living with dementia may want to discuss the decision and its possible consequences after having the appointment. Having written information allows a person living with dementia to reflect on information and facts in their own time. The person living with dementia may then understand the decision better and feel less pressure to decide in the moment.



Encourage and Support the Independence of the Person Living with Dementia In Decision-Making

The law presumes all people are capable to make decisions until it is proven they cannot. It also requires that a person be involved in decisions that affect them, regardless of whether they are considered capable. Different decisions may need more capacity than others, meaning a person living with dementia may not be able to manage their finances but could make certain care decisions. It is very important for you to know and respect the wishes, beliefs, and values of the person living with dementia. You can better support a person living with dementia in decision-making when you understand the basis for their decisions.

Sometimes the Decision May Have to Wait

People living with dementia often say that they need extra time and to not feel rushed when making decisions about their care and well-being. Many people living with dementia are better at understanding information at certain times of day; consider talking to them about decisions at a time of day that works well for them. This is often earlier in the day but depends on the person. Considerations such as medications and sleeping patterns are factors that could affect a person’s ability to make decisions. This may be difficult when decisions need to be made quickly.



Use Plain Language

Try to explain things as simply as possible, or in the way you know will resonate most strongly with the person living with dementia. This could look like making sure a translator is available at appointments or asking the health care professional to explain the risks in a different way.

A Person’s Preferences Can Change Over Time

Over the course of their journey, a person living with dementia’s wishes and values may change, and this may include a change in how they want to proceed with treatments. A decision may not make sense to you but if the person living with dementia expresses preferences, you must take those into account. All people, including people living with dementia, are allowed to live in risky situations, so long as they can understand and appreciate the consequences their decision.