

CareCertify LLC

Adult Day Services Training Series

ADS-06

Dementia & Cognitive Support

Participant Guide

Adult Day Services Training Series · Audience: Direct-Contact Staff · Volunteers · Subcontractors · Aides · CE Hours: 1.0

Understanding the Person Behind the Diagnosis

Dementia is a group of progressive conditions — Alzheimer's is the most common — that affect memory, thinking, language, and behavior. Many adult day participants live with dementia, and the center is often a highlight of their week and a lifeline for their caregivers. Skilled care makes the day safe, engaging, and dignified.

This guide focuses on what you can do: communicate so the person can receive you, offer meaningful engagement, support daily needs with dignity, and read behavior as a message about an unmet need.

Learning Objectives — by the end of this module you will be able to:

- Explain what dementia is and how it differs from normal aging
- Use person-centered, validating communication
- Provide meaningful engagement and activities
- Support daily needs with dignity
- Respond to challenging behaviors by identifying the unmet need

Section 1: Understanding Dementia

Dementia is an umbrella term for progressive conditions that impair memory, thinking, language, and judgment; Alzheimer's is the most common. It's caused by physical brain changes — not normal aging, and not willful behavior. Abilities fluctuate, so meet each participant at their current level rather than expecting yesterday's abilities.

Section 2: Person-Centered, Validating Communication

Approach from the front so you don't startle them, make eye contact, greet by name, and smile. Speak slowly in short, simple sentences, one idea at a time, and allow time to respond. Validate feelings instead of arguing facts. Your calm tone and body language set the emotional temperature.

Behavior is communication: most challenging behaviors express an unmet need — pain, hunger, fear, boredom, or needing the bathroom.

Section 3: Entering the Participant's Reality

Forceful reorientation usually causes distress and damages trust without lasting benefit. Enter the participant's reality and engage with the emotional truth of their experience. Reminiscence — talking about earlier life,

familiar music, old photos — reinforces identity and provides comfort, and adult day centers are wonderful settings for it.

Section 4: Meaningful Engagement and Activities

Meaningful engagement is central to good dementia care and a strength of adult day services. Offer activities matched to each participant's abilities and interests — music, art, movement, reminiscence, simple purposeful tasks. Focus on enjoyment, connection, and a sense of purpose rather than 'getting it right,' and adapt as abilities change. Engagement reduces boredom, agitation, and isolation.

Section 5: Supporting Daily Needs With Dignity

Daily activities — eating, toileting, moving around — can confuse someone with dementia. Break tasks into simple steps, offer limited choices, and keep routines consistent to lower anxiety. Protect dignity and privacy, explain before you act, and go at the participant's pace. Rushing or scolding increases distress and resistance.

Section 6: Problem-Solving Challenging Behaviors

Challenging behaviors are signals, not misbehavior. Keep everyone safe, stay calm, and avoid arguing or using force. Look for the trigger — pain, hunger, fatigue, overstimulation, loneliness, or needing the bathroom. Respond by meeting the need, redirecting, or adjusting the environment (reducing noise, offering quiet). Report patterns so the team can adjust support.

Never restrain for convenience

Physical or chemical restraints for discipline or convenience are prohibited and dangerous. De-escalation, redirection, and environmental changes come first.

Section 7: Safety and Wandering

Participants with dementia are at higher risk of wandering and elopement. Know who's at risk, account for everyone, and manage exits per the center's plan. Use routine and engagement to reduce restlessness, and reduce environmental hazards. Report changes in wandering or behavior so the team can keep the participant safe (supervision is covered in ADS-03).

Section 8: Reporting and Working Together

You see participants regularly, making you the team's eyes and ears. Report changes in cognition, mood, behavior, and physical health. A sudden, new increase in confusion can signal delirium — a medical emergency — and must be reported immediately. Work with the team and family, share approaches that work, and provide the consistent, compassionate care that makes the day meaningful.

Key Terms

Term	What it means
Dementia	A group of progressive conditions impairing memory, thinking, and behavior.

Alzheimer's disease	The most common cause of dementia.
Validation	Acknowledging a participant's feelings rather than correcting facts.
Meaningful engagement	Activities matched to abilities and interests for enjoyment and purpose.
Trigger	A cause behind a challenging behavior, such as pain, noise, or hunger.
Delirium	Sudden, new confusion from a medical cause — a medical emergency.

Check Your Understanding

1. How is dementia different from normal aging?
2. Give three communication techniques for a participant with dementia.
3. Why is meaningful engagement important?
4. What should you look for when a participant shows a challenging behavior?
5. What sudden change should you report immediately, and why?

What's Next

Looking ahead

Next, ADS-07: Participant Rights & Person-Centered Care covers participants' rights and putting them at the center.