

Information for teachers on supporting pupils affected by dementia

Dementia UK is the specialist dementia nursing charity. Our nurses, known as Admiral Nurses, offer life-changing support to families affected by all forms of dementia.

Introduction

Dementia has an impact on the whole family, including children. Children may see changes occurring in their relative and not understand what is happening, or feel able to talk about it.

Dementia UK has produced a short animated film, **Let's talk about dementia**, to raise awareness about dementia among children and help them start conversations about dementia and share their personal experiences.

We have developed this information sheet to answer some of the questions we are asked by teachers about talking to children about dementia. It will also be useful for parents and other adults involved in supporting children affected by dementia.



1. Where can I find information on dementia for children?

Dementia UK provides a variety of information about dementia. There is a dedicated section on our website to help you answer questions that are frequently asked by children and young people.

➤ dementiauk.org/supporting-children-and-adolescents

The page features a short animation, which can help to initiate conversations about dementia and how children might feel if they have someone with dementia in their family.

We have produced a ➤ **PowerPoint presentation** along with a suggested ➤ **activities sheet** to support teaching children about dementia.

2. How can a teacher best support an individual pupil who has a relative with dementia?

Children who have a relative with dementia, such as a parent or grandparent, may express their feelings and emotions in different ways and you may notice some changes in their behaviour. They may become quiet and withdrawn, act out of character or their school work may be affected, as seeing changes in someone they love may be very unsettling, especially if they do not understand what is happening.

If a parent/guardian of a pupil is a carer for someone with dementia, the child may be worried about them too, or it may be affecting family relationships. Living with someone with dementia can lead to significant anxiety, stress and **feelings of loss or grief**. Children may feel they have done something wrong if their parent has less time or emotional energy for them. Helping children understand the impact of dementia and providing the opportunity to talk can help them realise it is not their fault.

Tips to try:

- Establish what the child understands about dementia. It might be helpful to clarify **what it is** and how it can affect people
- Give the child some time to talk about their feelings. They may be angry and afraid as well as sad, and talking about their emotions could help
- Ask them if they have talked to their parent or another relative about how they are feeling. If not, consider meeting or communicating with the parent/close relative to discuss the best way to support the child
- Find out whether the school has a counsellor or therapist who the child could be referred to, or investigate local mental health or young carers' services that they may be able to access



3. What if a pupil is a carer for someone with dementia?

A child may be a carer for someone with dementia. This may be a parent, grandparent, other family member or friend. It can be especially difficult if the child's parent has **young onset dementia** (where symptoms develop before the age of 65). The family may be facing employment, financial and childcare issues, which may place significant pressure on the other parent or the child themselves, especially if they are in a single parent family.

Being a young carer can have a significant impact on a young person's health, social life and self-confidence. Many young carers struggle to juggle their education and caring responsibilities, which can cause pressure and stress. They may start missing school and could be bullied.



You may find our leaflet on **Supporting children and adolescents when a parent has young onset dementia** useful.

The following organisations provide information about the needs of young carers and information about local groups and support networks:

Carers UK: [carers.org/about-caring/about-young-carers](https://www.carers.org/about-caring/about-young-carers)

YoungMinds: [youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/young-carers](https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/coping-with-life/young-carers)

4. Where can I find general information about dementia?

The Dementia UK website provides information on the various **types of dementia** and how the condition can affect the person. It can be helpful to describe dementia as a journey: as the condition progresses, each stage of the journey is different, and can affect individuals in different ways.

People with dementia may need more help with the things many of us take for granted, such as remembering people and their names; **washing and dressing**; and **eating**, amongst other things. We have leaflets and short videos to explain these changes; you may want to use these as a basis for talking to children about dementia.

[dementiauk.org/information-and-support](https://www.dementiauk.org/information-and-support)

[dementiauk.org/understanding-changes-in-dementia-videos](https://www.dementiauk.org/understanding-changes-in-dementia-videos)



5. What can schools do to help children understand more about dementia and be involved in raising awareness?

Some schools now include dementia on their curriculum. If this is not the case in your school then it might be useful to have a short classroom session about dementia, particularly if you know some children have a relative with the condition. The animated film can be used as an introduction to initiate conversations and help children to talk about it. You can also find further information in our [▶ PowerPoint presentation](#), which is accompanied by suggested activities.

There are a number of illustrated books available that can be read to a class. You can find some suggestions at [▶ dementiauk.org/dementia-books-for-children](https://dementiauk.org/dementia-books-for-children)

As a follow-up to these books, you could plan [▶ group activities](#) such as creating memory boxes or making picture albums of special events children have experienced.

Fundraising for Dementia UK can be a good way for children to raise awareness about dementia while doing something practical to help families affected by the condition. You can find ideas for fundraising for schools at: [▶ dementiauk.org/fundraising-ideas-for-kids](https://dementiauk.org/fundraising-ideas-for-kids)



Further information and support

If you would like to speak to a specialist Admiral Nurse about supporting pupils affected by dementia, please call our free Helpline on **0800 888 6678** (Monday-Friday 9am-9pm; Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays 9am-5pm) or email [▶ helpline@dementiauk.org](mailto:helpline@dementiauk.org)