

Supporting An LGBT Person With Dementia

Dementia experiences vary greatly because of a person's environment, life events, personality, support network and relationships. People in the LGBT community may experience unique challenges and concerns.



Understanding And Support

While many challenges that people with dementia face are not affected by a person's gender identity or sexual orientation, there can be particular challenges for individuals with dementia who are LGBT.

Every person with dementia - as well as people in the LGBT community - are all unique. No matter how an individual identifies, it is best to not assume that what works for one person will work for another. What may be true for a bisexual man, may not be true for a lesbian woman, for example.



While identifying as a member of the LGBT community is may be a vital part of an individuals life, it does not define them. Each person brings their own life experiences, interests and personalities into the mix - supporting and assisting them to keep doing the things they enjoy should be tailored to the individual.

Worries LGBT People With Dementia May Have

Experiences with hostility, negative attitudes, abuse and rejection may be familiar to many in the LGBT community. They may have already endured the following, which could impact negatively their experiences with dementia:

Prejudice:

a preconceived opinion about them based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Hate Crime:

violence or aggression based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Discrimination:

unfair treatment based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

An example could be encountering discrimination or prejudice while seeking support services from social care organizations or healthcare providers. This could result in an individual not wanting to access those services or not want to disclose their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Worries LGBT People With Dementia May Have (cont'd)

It is important for people with dementia to feel safe. LGBT people may have concerns about connecting with medical staff and/or social workers, but it is significant to recognize an individuals' fears and hesitancy while being considerate of their life experiences and needs when providing support.

Because of prejudice and discrimination, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans may have not had the opportunity to ever feel safe in communicating their identity. Dementia can be an isolating disease and could be expounded by a person not having a 'safe space' in which to express their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Types Of Relationships LGBT People With Dementia May Have

There are many factors that may impact a person's personal relationships - it is important to not have pre-conceived assumptions. Here are some considerations:

- **'Family of Origin'** - for some in the LGBT community, the family that they were born into may not play a big role in their lives. There could be many reasons for this including, for example, a lack of comprehension about a person's gender identity or sexual orientation or conflict.
- **'Family of Choice'** - this is defined as people who are not a part of a Family of Origin, but provide support as a family would.
- Some in the LGBT community do not have children or grandchildren, therefore the relationships closest to them are other adult peers.
- Senior LGBT people commonly live on their own and are single.
- Others may view non heterosexual relationships as not as important and not understand their meaning. This can be a source of frustration and upsetting.
- When in a relationship, it is important that it be acknowledged. Those providing services and care, such as healthcare professionals should not make assumptions about the nature of a relationship. For example, if a lesbian woman is visited by her partner, it may cause distress if it is assumed that the partner is a sister or friend.



Tips For Supporting An LGBT Person With Dementia

- **Pronouns** - Ask the individual about the pronouns they wish to have used, for example, 'he', 'she' or 'they'.
- **Expression** - Discuss with the person about how they would like to express themselves and be seen by others and ensure they feel supported when making that decision, for example, they may identify as a trans woman or a bisexual man.
- **Openness** - Support the individual in their level of openness with others about their sexual orientation or gender identity, if there are people they do not wish to tell - respect their wishes.
- **Support** - Discuss with the person and support them in telling others who are important to them about the dementia diagnosis. This will assist others in having an understanding about changes in that person.
- **Respect** - An individuals preferences and wishes should always be respected.



Planning Ahead With An LGBT Person with Dementia

- Discuss wishes with the person living with dementia as early on as possible. This will include their care wishes, legal and financial matters, treatments and who they would like to be involved in supporting them and assisting them with their decision making. It is important to have this information in writing so that it is clear in later stages if a person is not able to communicate their wishes.
- Research care homes and assisted living facilities in the early stages so that you can ensure that if there is a need for a move, it will be to a place where their sexual orientation and gender identity is supported, and that they are respected and treated equally.
- Take the time to document the person with dementia's life history, likes and dislikes and what/who is important to them. This can assist healthcare professionals later on in having a better understanding and provide person-centered care designed for who that person is - not just that their identity is that of a person in the LGBT community.



Looking After Yourself As A Care Partner

Providing care for a person with dementia can be challenging but also rewarding. It is important to look after yourself and meet your own needs as well. This will assist you in continuing to be a care partner to the person you are helping. There can be specific challenges and obstacles for supporting an LGBT person with dementia, such as:

- Concerns about experiencing, or experiencing discrimination.
- Issues with access to services and inadequacy of support.
- Apprehension about disclosing your relationship to the person with dementia, or lack of recognition of the relationship.
- Negative attitudes from other people.
- Contention or conflict with the person with dementia's family of origin.



These challenges may be more pronounced if you are also LGBT. Remember that you also have the right to not face discrimination for your gender identity or sexual orientation.

We Can Help!

Alzheimer's Orange County

Call 844.373.4400

For more caregiver tips

Visit us at:
www.alzoc.org/resources

Information taken from the Alzheimer's Society UK
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