

Supporting Friends of People with Learning Disabilities and Dementia

The effect on other people with learning disabilities of seeing a friend deteriorate is rarely considered, yet it is vital for both the person with dementia and for their friends that attention is paid to this area.

The effect of the person's dementia on peers and co-residents needs to be considered and appropriate support offered on a repeated basis to help them cope with the changes they will see in the person.

There are a range of resources that can be used to help explain dementia to adults with learning disabilities. These include *The Journey of Life*, *About My Friend* and *About Dementia*, published by BILD; *Forget Me Not* - a DVD from the Down's Syndrome Association - and the *Ann has Dementia Books*, published by Beyond Words. These paperbacks explain different aspects of dementia and can be used alongside exercises, quizzes and role plays. They can be used individually or in a group setting, as long as supported by confident staff/carers.

When talking to friends who also have learning disabilities it is important to find out what they have noticed about the person with dementia and to help them understand what is happening to them.

Important issues to consider include:

- How the person with dementia will begin to change, i.e. they may become confused and start to get things muddled up and they may have trouble recognising people that they used to know well.
- The person will become disorientated.
- The person's personality may also begin to change. They may start to do and say strange things.
- The person will begin to need more help with daily living tasks and the friend can sometimes be involved in giving that help.
- The person may need to have changes to their activities and routines.
- They may feel resentful that extra staff time is being spent on the person with dementia.

Helping friends to understand dementia can reduce their distress and help them to be more considerate and understanding of the changes occurring within the person with dementia, in some cases helping to prevent placements breaking down.