

# PRESBYTERIAN VILLAGE NORTH

FOREFRONT LIVING



## Dementia Live™ Empowerment Tool Creating a Dementia-Friendly Environment

Adapting a home or living area to best accommodate the changing needs of a person living with dementia can be a significant challenge. But, some simple modifications can make the home safer and allow the individual to remain independent or semi-independent in their own home for as long as possible.

### Key Considerations When Planning Modifications

1. **Safety.** Providing a safe environment that enables greater independence for your loved one is the primary reason for environmental modifications. The challenge is to match the level of safety intervention with their changing abilities and disabilities.
2. **Control.** As the disease progresses, caregivers increasingly need the ability to monitor and sometimes control where the person is and what they are doing. But, people with dementia also have the desire—and the right—to make decisions. The challenge is to balance their ability to control choices with maintaining their safety.
3. **Maintaining independence.** People with dementia are constantly faced with what they can't do anymore because of the disease. To help them maintain self-esteem and a high quality of life, it is critical to find ways to enable them to continue to do their personal care and daily chores and activities as independently as possible.

### Create An Action Plan

1. **Assess the home.** Using a checklist (provided), look for changes that will need to be made to accommodate changing cognitive and sensory abilities.
2. **Prioritize modifications to be made.** Rank all modifications needed beginning with the most urgent safety concerns.
3. **Make a schedule.** Develop and write out a schedule for making the modifications including when they will be made and who will make the modifications. Remember: making too many changes at once can cause anxiety, fear, and disorientation for your loved one and even trigger negative behaviors. Once the most urgent safety matters are corrected, other modifications should be made gradually with enough time for adjustment.

All members of the household should be made aware of the modifications needed , the reasons for the modifications, and to the extent possible, be involved in the action plan for making the modifications.

### **Key Areas in the Home to Address:**

1. **Kitchen.** Lock up cleaning supplies. Turn off electricity to the garbage disposal. Hide knives and other sharp utensils. Keep counters clear of clutter, placing small appliances and items in drawers, especially if they are not being used on a regular basis or if they can present hazards. If needed, unplug microwave and oven, and remove knobs from stove. Keep a fire extinguisher nearby and clean out the refrigerator regularly.
2. **Bathroom.** Set the water temperature to no more than 120 degrees F. Install grab bars properly near toilet, shower, and bathtub. Install textured stickers to slippery and potentially slippery surfaces. Remove hand razors, sharp objects and supervise the use of hair dryers, electric razors, curling irons, etc. Remove all dangerous items from medicine chest and locks from doors. Monitor toilet paper use and briefs to avoid jammed toilets and major waste of unused briefs. As in the kitchen, lock up cleaning supplies.
3. **Garage.** Lock up hand and power tools, lawn equipment and other items that could be a hazard such as poisonous chemicals, paints and fertilizers.
4. **Outdoors.** Disconnect gas hookups from grills, lock fence gates, hide car keys and supervise elder, especially in areas that are not enclosed.
5. **Throughout the Home.** Firearms should be stored in a locked area. Use sturdy chairs that do not tip. Remove or tape down throw rugs and carpeting. Apply colored stickers to large windows and sliding glass doors. Remove objects that block walking pathways.
6. **Doors leading Outdoors.** Assess on an ongoing basis, the need for safety locks to prevent unsupervised wandering that could result in the individual with dementia becoming lost.

Be realistic about making modifications. It is impossible to prevent every problem that could arise. Try to make all changes while maintaining the same environment and routines. It will be easier for your loved one to adapt to a familiar environment than learn a new one.



Sources: IDEAS Consulting, Inc., Kirtland, OH  
Fisher Center for Alzheimer's Research Foundation, New York, NY