

Lessening the Impact of Dementia – Courses 2026

Dementia can bring changes to the brain, body and behaviour, but our courses focus on its effects on the person inside. Rather than fighting against it as a disease, we work positively with it as a disability. This reduces its impact on the person, so behaviour becomes less of an issue.

Courses for Family Carers

We began offering interactive training via online meetings in 2020. Even carers prevented from joining in face-to-face events by their caring role, location or even lockdown could attend, and their feedback was overwhelmingly positive. We now deliver courses online, with one face-to-face course in a different part of Wokingham borough each term.

We run 8 weekly interactive sessions for about 6 trainees. The training is free of charge, but we ask carers to purchase our booklet @£5. Each session includes a short presentation, with time for Q&A and discussion. During the course participants gain a better understanding of what the dementia is doing to the person they support, and how to lessen its impact on them. Each week we focus on a different aspect of our approach; trainees can try out techniques between sessions and discuss the outcome the following week. Carers gradually deepen their understanding of dementia, develop their skills and build mutually supportive relationships within the group. After completing the course, we invite participants to join our online community of family carers using this approach for ongoing discussion and support.

Topics covered in each 75-minute interactive session:

1. **Introduction to Understanding Dementia**
 - what's different about this approach, and how it can lessen the impact of dementia
2. **Well-being in dementia**
 - its importance, why it is so vulnerable in dementia, and how to support it
3. **Questions**
 - why they can be unhelpful in dementia, and how to find better ways to support choice
4. **Being a buddy**
 - how to get alongside the people you care for, and build better relationships
5. **Contradiction and confrontation**
 - why they are best avoided, and how to do that without getting tangled up in lies
6. **Listening and talking skills**
 - what to listen out for, what we can learn, and how to deal with repetitive questions
7. **The hazards of 'parenting' our elders**
 - why role reversal can cause problems, and how to address 'difficult' behaviour
8. **Where do we go from here?**
 - planning ahead to avoid a crisis

We have interactive online training courses for health and care professionals too - see our website for details. When care is shared among a team of people trained in this approach, it has a more seamless and unobtrusive feel to the person at its centre.

Below are some examples of feedback from family carers:

“Loved the format. It was a good balance of themed and focussed presentation and contributions from the participants. I have passed the booklets on to the family and they all found them useful... It feels like we are working together and that is a huge comfort.”

Pip, caring for her mother-in-law, 2020

“The Understanding Dementia course that I am currently attending has been so useful in helping me to look at dementia from a different, and more positive perspective, and it has helped me to feel more able to support my mum’s well-being through simple yet very effective changes in my verbal and non-verbal communication. As a result of this course, my family have noticed an improvement in her self-esteem and mood, and she is less distressed. I feel that it would be very beneficial, if not essential, to anyone who is in the position of caring for someone with dementia.”

Gillian, caring for her mother, 2021

“Thank you so much for such an incredible course. I found the content both immensely validating for the things I was doing right and enlightening for the blind spots! I particularly liked how you delivered the training; allowing plenty of space to share, reflect and bring up often buried feelings. Right now, being on the course together with my dad has already given us the vocabulary to discuss it together, and relate my mum’s behaviours to specific lessons. Your work is incredible!”

Kengo, supporting his father to care for his mother, 2022

“After attending an eight-week course run by Shirley I realised what a great practical help it is to a struggling carer. Shirley has revealed a common thread that runs through every person with dementia irrespective of differing behaviour pattern, which is their feelings. This was at the heart and core of Shirley’s course, teaching us to respond to feelings through a series of practical lessons that I would call “Tools”. Each lesson could be used as and when to fit the occasion and behaviour, and they work. I could not, and would not, want to be without them. Every carer should endeavour to take this course.”

Fred, caring for his wife, 2023

“From the bottom of my heart I would like to thank you both for trying to help me understand what my husband is experiencing. I think I have been very lucky in doing this course while he is still in the early stages of this debilitating disease...thank you for explaining how to deal with many issues and differing scenarios. I now have some understanding of WHY things are happening, and am beginning to realise that by changing my reactions and statements when strange things occur, situations are avoided and life is much happier all round...”

Lyn, caring for her husband, 2023

“The course is just amazing. It has given me an entirely new perspective of the effects of dementia on people. I am able to understand my mother’s condition much better, resulting in a much better relationship with her. The content and delivery of the course is par excellence and the way Shirley conducts the course is unparalleled. Also, Lucy is incredible in the way she supports the team in all the administrative tasks, making the lives of all the attendees so much easier. I don’t think I will ever have enough words to thank Shirley for this excellent course, but still, a big thank you!”

Rohit, caring for his mother, 2024