

Activity

More and more people with dementia are writing and speaking publicly about what it feels like to live with dementia. One of the richest accounts comes from the Australian writer Christine Bryden in her book, *Dancing with dementia* (2005). Christine writes:

“We feel as if we are hanging onto a high cliff, above a lurking black hole. Daily tasks are complex. Nothing is automatic anymore. Everything is as if we are first learning.”

Christine was formerly a top civil servant who was diagnosed with dementia at the age of 46.

Reading about people's experiences or watching movies about the experience of dementia can be powerful ways of increasing our empathy for the feelings associated with living with dementia. Using guided fantasy is another powerful way of doing this.

A guided fantasy

This is a guided fantasy exercise for you to tap into your own memories and personalities as you consider how you might react to some of the symptoms we know are common in dementia.

1. **Imagine yourself a little older than you are now.**
2. **Imagine yourself in a dementia care setting you know well, say a day facility or a care home.**
3. **Picture exactly where you are sitting or standing.**
4. **Reflect on why you have chosen that position. Now think about:**
 - **What can you see from that position?**
 - **What do the other people look like who are sitting down?**
 - **Who passes by?**
 - **What do they look like?**
 - **What are they wearing?**
 - **What noises can you hear?**
 - **What smells can you smell?**

(continued on next sheet)

Getting to know the person with dementia:

Understanding dementia

social care
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You do not know this place but it seems sort of familiar. You have no idea how you got here or how you are going to get home. You can't think where the car is and you have no money or keys.

You have a bad feeling about some of the people around you and good feelings about some of the others. You think you might know a couple of the other people but can't for the life of you remember any of their names. Some people know your name. Others call you by a name you don't recognise.

You find it very difficult to explain what you want and you frequently lose the thread of conversation and cannot find the right word. Your movements feel clumsy and even simple tasks that you know you should be able to do elude you. You have a pain in your leg but you do not know why.

Your emotional reactions to what you see are still the same. What has always made you smile and laugh still makes you smile and laugh, and the things that have always made you want to cry, still make you want to cry. Things that have always made you feel angry, still make you feel angry.

As you reflect on this place what is the thing that you most want at this point? What could help alleviate some of your distress?

What wouldn't you want to happen?

What might add to your distress?

Using your own long-term memories, imagine where you think you are.

If someone was observing you, what would they see you doing?