DEEP Guide

The Dementia Engagement and Empowerment Project

Writing dementia-friendly information

Key messages

- **People with dementia have the right to written information about things that affect them, presented in a way that is as easy to understand as possible**
- **Language, style, length and format can all make a big difference to how easy it is to understand a document.**

Why produce specific documents for people with dementia?

Written information can be very helpful for many people. A written document can be re-read many times, with support if necessary, and is a permanent record.

However, many people with dementia find reading and understanding written information difficult. This may be because:

- It is too long.
- The language and written style used is ‘professional’ and full of jargon.
- The way the document is set out is offputting.
- The content does not seem relevant to people with dementia.

Style, language and layout

People with dementia want information that is clear, easy to understand and presented in a positive way. Here are some suggestions from people with dementia about how to provide accessible written information:

Style

- Present information logically, one piece at a time.
- Keep language simple without being patronising. Remember that you are writing for an adult audience.
- Write concisely. Remove unnecessary words, which distract from the main message. Keep to one subject in each sentence.
- Be clear in the words that you use.
- Avoid jargon. Explain all terms and concepts clearly. Consider using a glossary.
- Paragraphs should make sense on their own. People should not have to remember what was in the first paragraph in order to understand the last one.
- Quotations and examples can help put information in context.

Use of pictures

- Diagrams and pictures alongside text are helpful. However, too many images can be confusing. They should be relevant and not used simply for decoration.
- Photographs are often preferable to illustrations, especially cartoons, which are sometimes difficult to interpret or seem patronising.
- Perception problems can mean that people find photographs difficult to interpret. Photographs should clearly represent the item you are illustrating rather than be ‘artistic’. If the photograph is of a person, don’t chop off part of their head!
- Text should not overlay pictures or photographs.

Making sense of content

- Colour can be used to distinguish between different sections of information.
- Use bullet points, bold text, titles and headings to separate information. Present it in manageable chunks. This can stop people feeling overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information on a page.
- Put information that you want to stand out inside boxes. This can help people to return to information that they found useful.

Layout

- Text set out in two columns is difficult to read. One column is much easier for the eye to follow.
- Bigger type is easier to read. A font size of at least 12pt is good. 14pt is ideal.
- Avoid italics, which is more difficult to read.
- Choose an uncluttered font without serifs or 'curly bits'. Use Arial rather than Times New Roman.
- White space around text is good. Too many words on a page can be overwhelming.
- Split information into manageable chunks and always finish a sentence on the same page it starts on.
- Use of colour helps with interest and concentration.

Format

- A booklet is better than loose-leaf papers and reduces the possibility of losing sections.
- Don't overwhelm with too much information: less is often more.

See also…

Creating a dementia-friendly York, published by JRF. Available at www.jrf.org.uk/publications/creating-dementia-friendly-york

This guide was created with help from The Forget Me Not group, Swindon and JRF Sounding Board

DEEP guides aim to support the involvement of people with dementia. Some are aimed at DEEP groups, others at organisations wanting to work well with people with dementia. They have all been co-produced with people with dementia and will be updated regularly throughout the project. Suggestions for new guides are welcome – contact Rachael Litherland at Innovations in Dementia: email rachael@myid.org.uk or telephone 01392 420076.

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