



DEMENTIA CARE SERIES

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

THOUGHTS & SUGGESTIONS FOR CARING

Caring Sheet #18: Transferring Persons with Dementia

By Diane Dirette, PhD, OTR

Introduction

Transferring means helping a person move from one surface to another. Dementia may complicate the transferring task. This caring sheet offers suggestions for transferring a person with dementia as safely and as comfortably as possible.

Common Problems

Some of the following problems, which are associated with dementia, can contribute to difficulty with transferring.

- Loss of motor-planning skills (i.e., reduced ability to organize movements to perform a task)
- Reduced visual and perceptual skills (e.g., depth perception, position of objects)
- Fear of falling
- Reduced ability to follow directions
- Loss of memory of how to perform the task
- Anxiety in response to being moved

Types of Transfers

Transfers can be carried out in a variety of ways to a variety of surfaces. The following types of transfers can be used when you are helping the person move back and forth to and from a car, a chair, a bed, a tub seat or a bench.



- **Stand Pivot Transfer:** Use this transfer with people who can put their full weight on their legs and come to a full stand.
- **Modified Stand Pivot Transfer:** Use this transfer with people who can put some weight on their legs, but are unable to bring themselves to a full stand.
- **Sliding Board Transfer:** Use this transfer with people who are unable to help themselves stand or who are unable to put weight on their legs.

Steps for Transferring

Decide which type of transfer is best for you to use in this situation. Then follow the steps that are listed below for each type. A good transfer will address the common problems identified above.

- **Stand Pivot Transfer:**
 1. Set the surface you are moving from as close as possible and at a 45 degree angle to the surface to which you are moving (the destination). For example, put the wheelchair as close as possible to the tub bench.
 2. Help the person move as far forward as possible on the surface.
 3. Help the person place both of her or his feet on the floor and to lean forward. Be sure the person is wearing footwear with a non-skid bottom.
 4. Stand directly in front of the person.
 5. Tell the person you are going to help her or him move from one place to the other. Show the person the destination.
 6. Bend at your knees and straddle your legs with the person's legs. This straddle can be done one of two ways, whichever is most comfortable. You can put one of your legs between the person's legs and one on the side of the destination surface, or you can put both legs on the outside of the person's legs. Put your arms



around the person's hips. Have the person give you a big hug around your shoulders without pulling on your neck.

7. Ask the person (with gestures, words, or physical assistance) to turn her or his face toward the destination to see where she or he is going.
8. Tell the person you are going to stand up on the count of three.
9. Count to three and pull the person forward from the hips into a standing position.
10. Slowly help the person take small pivot steps (small turning steps on flat feet) around toward the destination surface.
11. When the person can touch the destination surface with the back of her or his legs, slowly guide the person into a seated position.

• **Modified Stand Pivot Transfer:**

1. Set the surface you are moving from as close as possible and at a 45 degree angle to the surface to which you are moving (the destination). For example, put the wheelchair as close as possible to the tub bench. If possible, remove or swing away the armrests that are on the adjacent sides of the surfaces. In other words, clear the way for your transfer.
2. Help the person move as far forward as possible on the surface.
3. Help the person place both of her or his feet on the floor and to lean forward. Be sure the person is wearing footwear with a non-skid bottom.
4. Stand directly in front of the person.
5. Tell the person you are going to help her or him move from one place to the other. Show the person the destination.
6. Bend at your knees and straddle your legs with the person's legs. This straddle can be done one of two ways, whichever is most comfortable. You can put one of your legs between the person's legs and one on the side of the destination surface, or you can put both legs on the outside of the person's legs. Put your arms around the person's hips. Have the person give you a big hug around your shoulders without pulling on your neck.



7. Ask the person (with gestures, words, or physical assistance) to turn her or his face toward the destination to see where she or he is going.
 8. Tell the person you are going to move on the count of three.
 9. Count to three, pull the person forward from the hips into a half-standing position and pivot with the person onto the destination surface. The person will not come to a complete stand.
- **Sliding Board Transfer:**
 1. For this transfer, you will need a piece of equipment called a sliding board. A sliding board is a flat wooden board used to bridge the gap between two surfaces. It is available at most medical supply stores. Set the two surfaces as close together as possible. Remove or swing away the armrests that are on the adjacent sides of the surfaces. In other words, clear the way for your transfer.
 2. Help the person scoot forward on the surface on which she or he is seated.
 3. Make a bridge between the surface and the destination surface. Place one end of the sliding board under the person's leg that is closest to the destination, and the other end of the sliding board on the destination surface.
 4. Stand directly in front of the person.
 5. Tell the person you are going to help her or him move from one place to the other. Show the person the destination.
 6. Bend at your knees and straddle your legs with the person's legs. This straddle can be done one of two ways, whichever is most comfortable. You can put one of your legs between the person's legs and one on the side of the destination surface, or you can put both legs on the outside of the person's legs. Put your arms around the person's hips. Have the person give you a big hug around your shoulders without pulling on your neck.



7. Ask the person (with gestures, words, or physical assistance) to turn her or his face toward the destination to see where she or he is going.
8. Tell the person you are going to begin to move on the count of three.
9. Count to three and scoot the person onto the board.
10. Continue scooting the person along the board (using the counts of three) until the person is on the destination surface.

Tips for Cueing

Cueing usually needs to occur before and during the transfer. Cueing means guiding the person through the task. In general, you should keep cues as simple and consistent as possible. Here are some suggestions for various types of cues.

- **Verbal Cueing:**

Try to give simple one to two word verbal cues. If you have to repeat your cue, try to use the same words and tone. Be directive, but not demanding. Try not to be emotional with your words. For example, don't sound angry or impatient. Try to maintain a neutral, matter-of-fact tone in your voice.

- **Visual Cueing:**

The visual surroundings can be very confusing for the person you are transferring. Try to keep the area clear of clutter. Use contrasts to help the person distinguish the location of objects. For example, a white shower chair might blend into the white tub and can make the person feel like she or he is dropping into the tub. A colored shower chair can make the chair more visible. Point to the surface you are going from and the destination surface. Make sure the person can see where she or he is going during the transfer.



DEMENTIA CARE SERIES

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

THOUGHTS & SUGGESTIONS FOR CARING

Caring Sheet #18
Transferring Persons
D. Dirette
Page 6 of 6

- **Manual Cueing:**

Use both your touch and the person's touch to help guide the transfer. Your touch on the person should be firm, but not aggressive. Think of a good dancer providing the lead to his partner. Also, let the person touch the destination surface. This could increase confidence that the move won't leave her or him on the floor. Hug each other during the transfer for added security.

In general, a calm, gentle, reassuring, yet directive touch and manner are most helpful while transferring a person with dementia.

© Copyright 1999 by D. Dirette (Page 6 and Header Revised 2018).

Citation: Dirette, D. (1999). #18 - Transferring Persons with Dementia. *Dementia Care Series Caring Sheets: Thoughts & Suggestions for Caring*. Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Edited and produced by Eastern Michigan University (EMU) Alzheimer's Education and Research Program for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), with gratitude to the Huron Woods Residential Dementia Unit at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The author, Diane Dirette was Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy at Eastern Michigan University.

Editor: Shelly Weaverdyck, PhD, Former Director EMU Alzheimer's Education and Research Program; Email: sweaverd@umich.edu

All Caring Sheets are available online at the following websites:

http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4868_38495_38498---,00.html (Michigan Department of Health and Human Services MDHHS), at <http://www.lcc.edu/mhap> (Mental Health and Aging Project (MHAP) of Michigan at Lansing Community College in Lansing, Michigan), and at <https://www.improvingmipractices.org/populations/older-adults> (Improving MI Practices website by MDHHS)

The Caring Sheets were originally produced as part of the in-kind funding for the Michigan Alzheimer's Demonstration Project. Funded by the Public Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration (1992-1998) and the Administration on Aging (1998-2001) 55% federal funding and 45% in-kind match. Federal Community Mental Health Block Grant funding supported revisions to Caring Sheets (2002-2018).