STAFF ARTICLE

Memory care language for aides and float staff

Updated October 2025

Words at the bedside become the culture of the unit. Aides rotate fastest through memory care neighbourhoods in many Quebec and Ontario homes. Short phrases that protect dignity travel well on room cards and in huddles. This article is for personal support workers, activity aides, and volunteers who need plain scripts when cognition changes.

Replace testing with invitation

Memory is connection, at a listening pace. Swap **Do you remember your daughter's name?** for **Your daughter visited yesterday. She brought flowers.** If you need information, ask the nurse or chart rather than quizzing the resident.

Use **Tell me about…** and **When you are ready…** Offer choice: **Tea or water today?** Thank people for sharing stories instead of grading recall.

Person-first and Canadian vocabulary

Say **person living with dementia**. Use **memory care** or **secure neighbourhood** to match your home's sign. **Long-term care** and **personal care home** are familiar to families. Use **care home** on resident-facing cards unless you quote policy.

Canadian spelling on printed sheets: colour, centre, travelled. **Grey** cup week uses Canadian spelling.

When residents are distressed

Validate emotion before fact. **That sounds frightening. I am here with you.** Redirect time or place only when safety needs a brief anchor. Offer a sensory anchor: a soft cloth, a photo, a walk to the window.

In Atlantic homes, staff sometimes hum a familiar kitchen party tune. In Prairie homes, a calm radio station may soothe. Match volume to hearing aids.

Bathing, meals, and personal care scripts

Announce each step. **I am going to wash your hands now.** One instruction at a time. Wait for a nod or touch when possible. Praise cooperation: **Thank you for holding the cup.**

At meals, describe food simply. **Mashed potato and chicken.** Offer two visible choices on a tray card.

Family visitors at the door

Coach families with one printed tip sheet. Suggest sitting side by side, like a visit at the kitchen table. Recommend bringing photos with labels optional. Encourage short visits when fatigue shows.

If a visitor uses baby talk, model respectful tone beside the resident.

Documentation that helps the next shift

Write behaviour in plain language. **Restless before supper, calmed with music and hand hold** beats jargon alone. Note which phrases worked. **Responded well to fishing story prompt.**

Protect privacy on whiteboards. Use first names only per policy.

Training in ten minutes at shift change

Read one card aloud. Practice the replacement phrase in pairs. Post a **say this / try this** list above the printer. Update it when residents teach you better words.

Scripts for common situations

Repeated question: I hear you asking about going home. You are safe here tonight. Would you like tea or a walk to the window?

Accusation: I can see you are upset. I will stay with you while we figure this out together. Call staff per wandering or aggression protocol.

Shadowing staff: You are good company. I need to help the kitchen now. Maria will sit with you. Hand off with a warm name.

Sundowning: Lower lights, reduce noise, offer familiar music at low volume. Keep programs familiar after supper.

Working with interpreters and cultural brokers

When families interpret, give them the printed card ahead of time so they have the phrases in hand. For residents who switch languages, follow their lead. Match their language choice.

In multilingual homes, post pictograms for toilet, pain, and thirsty on the wall. Icons help when words are tired.

Anti-stigma for younger aides

New graduates sometimes whisper that memory care is hard. Rotate aides through short successes: one story recorded with consent, one smile at the window. Language shapes how they describe the unit in the community.

Pairing with recreation programs

When a group program ends, aides bring residents back with the same calm tone used at the bedside. Ask **Would you like water or a rest in your chair?** instead of quizzing about fun.

Room cards should mirror aide language so volunteers and staff sound consistent.

Quick reference table

Instead of	Try
Do you remember?	Tell me about…
Good job on the answer!	Thank you for sharing.
Facility	Care home or long-term care
Sufferer	Person living with dementia
Test	Explore or look together

Laminate the table inside the aide station cupboard.

Your next step: print the memory care language card from your weekly pack, highlight three lines your team will use this week, and review them at the next huddle before lunch service.

BetterCare printable recreation resources for Canadian long-term care, personal care homes, and retirement residences. Share with your team. Adapt for local policy and clinical direction.