

Screening Passengers with Dementia (Part 2)

- **Explain what is going to happen.** Use unhurried explanations, for example: “We’re going to put the things you’re carrying in the bin, and afterwards we’ll give them all back.”
- **Give one instruction at a time.** Allow some time for them to respond - at least 20 seconds - before repeating yourself.
- **Accompany verbal instructions with gestures demonstrate the behavior you are requesting from them.** When you are making a visual identification, remove your own mask to demonstrate that they need to remove their mask.
- **Always give advance warning before you touch someone,** even if it is a reassuring touch on the arm or handing back documents. Do not grab or move someone into place.
- **If an individual living with dementia is not reacting well to your requests, try a different tone of voice.** Be respectful and do not over react. Pause before you start talking to give them a chance to become ready to listen to you. If you don’t understand what they are saying, move them to the side and say gently, “I don’t understand, can you share that with me again?”
- **If someone is angry about following a procedure, try giving them control by offering choices between things that you need them to do.** For example, “Would you prefer to put your keys in the bin first, or your jacket?” If there is an alternative to a specific security procedure that they are having difficulty with, offer them the choice. For example, “Would you prefer to have a pat-down or go through the body scanner?”
- **If they are frustrated, validate their emotions by using empathetic statements that show you understand what they are feeling.** Once they’ve explained their situation (or tried to) you should first repeat their words, then mirror their emotions and finally propose a solution. “You’re mad this place is so noisy. Let me see if we can find a quieter place to go through security.” “Your feet are killing you. Come with me, and I’ll get someone here with a cart.” “This really is a long line. I know where there’s a shorter one. Come with me.” “Yeah, there sure are a lot of confusing signs around here. You don’t have to worry anymore because I’m going to help you find the right place.”
- **Diffuse the situation.** “I’m sorry this happened” goes a long way to diffusing tension. “I’m sorry I made you feel upset. That wasn’t my intent. Will you let me try again?” If you can use camaraderie to develop a connection, you can help the traveler succeed. If you have really upset a traveler, have a coworker jump in to defuse the tension.

This briefing is provided by the Dementia-Friendly Airports Working Group (DFAWG) which promotes dementia-friendly airport protocols.

In the Words of an Individual Living with Dementia is attached for additional reading.