

THE
Lodge
— AT BUFFALO HILL —

A Ministry of Immanuel Lutheran Communities

Family Moments

Understanding the Person with Alzheimer's

By Jolene Brackey



Jolene Brackey, author of "Creating Moments of Joy shares many warm, practical solutions to ease the daily struggles related to Alzheimer's and Dementia.

www.enhancedmoments.com

Family Moments

They lose their short-term memory

We know people with Alzheimer's lose their short-term memory. This is why they repeat their stories, why they cannot remember what they had for breakfast, or that you visited the night before. Instead of making them utilize their short-term memory, focus on their long-term memory. Instead of asking if someone came to visit them last night, talk about that person in general. "Your husband is a hard worker. He sure likes to..."

What about that story they tell you over and over again and you want to say, "You already told me that 10 times!" Please refrain and see the positive side to their story. Think to yourself, this is the story I must remember. As the disease progresses and they lose their ability to communicate, this is the story I can tell them over and over again that will put a light in their eye and possibly a smile on their face.

Another situation, which happens frequently, is when you remind them over and over again they have an appointment. When you arrive to pick them up, they say, "No one told me. I am not ready to go." First of all, stop reminding them of upcoming events because they will not remember. Instead, come an hour early and say, "I am here to take you to...."

"Our value lies in what we are and what we have been, not in our ability to recite the recent past." Homer, A man with Alzheimer's.

As the disease progresses, their age regresses

As the disease progresses, a person with Alzheimer's will get and younger in their mind. In other words, they lose more and more of their short-term memory. Early in the disease they may have lost the last 10 years, but as the disease progresses they may lose the last 40 years, the last 60 years and so on. This is why they don't recognize their spouse, because in their mind, they think they are 25 and their spouse is too old. They may ask where their mom is or want to go to work. If you see them talking to themselves in the mirror, they think they are talking to another person because they don't recognize themselves. That person in the mirror is much older than they are. If they think the reflection in the mirror is someone else and causing a negative reaction, then you will want to remove any mirrors in their room.

First of all, figure out what age they are living. For instance, if they are looking for their spouse, but do not recognize their spouse, you can assume they remember they are married, which is usually between the age of 20 to 40. If they are looking for their mom, you can assume they are an adolescent. Once you figure out what age they are living, then you need to think about what was significant in their life at that time. Talking about that time in their life can trigger memories you may not have heard before. This is an opportunity to get to know them in a different way because they don't recognize you. Use this new information to create moments of joy for both of you.

A daughter came up to me and started talking about her father who has Alzheimer's. She told me how when she was growing up, she was the only girl to three boys. Her

father spent the majority of time with the boys so she didn't know her dad very well. Today he has Alzheimer's and she is his caregiver. She is getting to know her dad for the first time BECAUSE he doesn't recognize her as his daughter. But he says her name with tears in his eyes, which tells her he does love her very much.

They may not recognize you, but they have not forgotten you!

Triggering Long-Term Memories

For the most part, their long-term memories are still there IF we learn how to trigger them. So, let's begin! The more we incorporate their five senses (touch, smell, visual, sound, and taste) the more likely we are to trigger memories. One of the best ways to trigger memories is with tangible "stuff". "Stuff" that is significant and familiar to them. If they enjoy making things out of wood, bring in their old tools or something they have made and act like you don't know how these tools work, but want to learn. Or maybe you just want the story behind the item they made. Whichever the case, you are more likely to get them to communicate if they have something to see, touch, feel and smell.

Food is another wonderful way to trigger memories. Bring a homemade warm loaf of bread and you are sure to get memories from all the people you share it with. Bring in beans to snap and approach it like this, "I picked all these beans from my garden and was hoping you would help me snap them." They need to feel needed and they also need to see a purpose in what they are helping you with. If they give the project like it is a job they are less likely to enjoy it. If you make it seem like they are doing you a HUGE favor and you thank them for all their help, they are more likely to feel pride and joy from their work. Just donating garden vegetables for the activity person to share with the residents will bring joy to many.

As the disease progresses, it becomes more and more difficult for them to communicate, so we must change the way we communicate with them. Avoid asking questions that require them to respond with a sentence. Instead, turn your question around so all they have to say is "yes" or "no". For example, "What was your mom like?" This is a question that they must reply with a sentence. It is better to say, "Does your mom have brown curly hair like you?" They are more capable of responding with a yes or no. "Is your mom a hard worker?" "Can she sing?" If they come back with jumbled words and you do not understand what they just said, it is important that you act like you understood everything. Listen to their tone of voice and watch their facial expressions, this will help in understanding them. Also use generic responses like "I didn't know that", "Interesting", "Really?" and "I agree". These are magic statements to reassure them you are listening and they are being heard.

Familiar smells can mean a lot when they are unable to communicate with words, especially in the final stages of Alzheimer's. A pleasant smell that could trigger a pleasant memory...your mom's Jergen's hand lotion or your dad's Old Spice. Triggering memories is a gift for both parties. When you trigger a good feeling, pass it on, so together we can create moments over and over again.

“On Mother’s Day, I took my mother something special from her past, her mother’s purse. It was a small, beaded, cloth handbag filled with keepsakes that belonged to her mother (who died at a young age, but memories still lingered on in spite of my mom’s Alzheimer’s). When Mom opened the clasp of the handbag, she found several things inside that she could take out and hold in her hands, tiny gloves, fancy combs that were used in her mother’s hair, ring box with an opal ring, a small envelope and a note inside with her mother’s handwriting, and a small portrait of her mother and her father.

Very carefully, she took out everything; very carefully she put back everything. She smiled as she did it. She enjoyed smelling and touching everything. For a long time, Mom sat at the table and enjoyed the purse. She laid each thing on the table while we talked about her mother. Her favorite memory was seeing her mother brush her long brown hair as she stood in her bedroom in front of the mirror. She brushed it and then arranged it on the top of her head using the combs to keep it in place.”

--Excerpt from Butterscotch Sundaes, written by Virginia McCone.

It is true that family heirlooms and keepsakes are irreplaceable. It is also true that you should not leave them here because it may get misplaced or hidden. But create a moment joy by bringing them when you visit and then take them home again. Stuff isn't valuable until it brings a smile to someone's face. Priceless memories "this stuff" triggers for you too!

Join Their Journey

If your family member wants to feed the cattle or they ask you where their husband is, don't try to orient them to the present by saying, "John, don't you remember you sold your cows 20 years ago" or "Mary, your husband has been gone for 10 years. You are now living at ..." these kind of statements can be extremely terrifying for the person with Alzheimer's. Your purpose is to reassure them that whatever or whoever they are looking for is perfectly OK. So instead, respond by saying, "I fed the cattle already today, they are just fine. You have taught me so much about farming" or "Mary, your husband is in the field." Remember, your goal is to say whatever it takes to help them feel safe and secure "for the moment ". If you ever wonder if your answer was a "good one" just look at their facial expression and that will tell all. It's OK to make mistakes ... they have short term memory loss and don't remember the answer you gave them 2 minutes ago. Your mission is to keep changing your answer until you find the one that works.

If they have lucidity for a moment and they catch you in a fib, quickly apologize and say you misunderstood. You could also distract by talking about something else. Most importantly, take things lightly. You have a better chance to get a positive response.

Live Their Truth

No matter how hard we try, we cannot bring back their short-term memory. We can,

however, take hold of their long-term memory and use it to create moments of joy. This means we need to live in their reality. When they are looking for their mom, think about what their mom did during the day and then use that as your answer so they feel like their mother is ok. For example, “she’s out doing chores”, “she’s in the kitchen making breakfast”, “she is doing the laundry”, etc. By giving answers that make sense to them, they are able to relax and not worry about where their mom is. Talk about their mom. Find out, maybe for the first time, what she was really like.

It is difficult for people to live their truth, to tell them their mom is doing chores when their mom is really gone, to tell them their horse is in the barn when they no longer have a horse. We don’t like doing this because we feel we are lying to them. I reassure you it is not lying but is “living their truth”. No matter how hard you try to bring them to OUR reality you will lose in the end because they will ultimately think you are lying, trying to hurt them, or you are an imposter.

Maybe it will help if you visualize yourself in their position. You have Alzheimer's but do not remember you do and you think you are perfectly fine. You are actually 85 but think you are 24. You wake up every morning in a strange place. You remember you have children but you cannot find them. You ask a stranger who acts as if they know who you are, "Where are my children?" They tell you the truth ... "Your husband isn't visiting until Tuesday. You live here now. Everything will be fine. Your reaction would be, "Everything will not fine because this is not my home. My children need me. I want to go home! Does this vision help you understand? More importantly I hope it takes away some of the guilt you feel about 'lying'.

Bottom line is this...there is no reasoning with a person who has Alzheimer's and you will not be able to make them live your reality. You can fight until you are blue in the face but you will lose in the end. Live THEIR reality and find treasures in THEIR reality. By enforcing their thought pattern whatever that may be, you have a better chance of going into a more meaningful conversation.

"Meet them where they are and on pleasant terms." Virginia McCone

Stop Correcting Them

Before you connect them on the layers of clothes they are wearing, before you correct their story, before you correct them about being in someone else's room, ask yourself three questions. 1) What they are doing right now, is it hurting me? (not annoying ... use the word hurting) 2) What they are doing right now, is it hurting anyone else here? 3) What they are doing, right now is it hurting them? If the answer is "No" to those three questions, let them do what they want to do. Isn't that what you would want? By correcting them you are only adding stress and agitation to their day. How would you like to be corrected all day long? Please apply these same guidelines when another person with Alzheimer's is in your mom's room. Is this hurting me? Is this hurting my mom? Is this hurting anyone else? We need to understand the other people here with Alzheimer' are also doing the best they can with the

abilities they have left.

When you visit and they are carrying around someone else's stuff or wearing someone else's sweater. (or someone else is carrying around your mom's stuff) Don't correct them ... instead say to yourself, that doll must be familiar. I need to go to shopping and get her 5 dolls that look like that one because it brings her comfort. You ask why they need 5 dolls ... because the doll will get lost and other people want to hold the doll too.

For the most part, people with Alzheimer's do not think there is anything wrong with them. They are not doing these things to make you upset., they are doing the best they can with the abilities they have left. So let them "be" no matter if it's wrong or right. Let them have what they want to hold whether it is theirs or not. Now you have just assured them that everything is OK. What a comforting feeling to leave them with!

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto ... your mom and dad. "

Blame Everything on Something or Someone Else

If you must take the car keys away ... If they accuse you of stealing from them...blame someone else for the wrong they feel is occurring to them. You do not want to take the blame if you are the main person who takes care of them. You want them to like you so you must portray you are only here to help. If you must take the cars keys away because they are no longer safe on the road, call the local police and ask them to do it. If they think someone is stealing their things, say you will call the cops and leave the room. Go get a drink of water or walk around for a little while. The important part is that they feel you have heard them and you are going to take care of it. If they blame you for putting them in this facility transfer the blame to the Dr. or a person from their past they don't like, or the bad weather this winter.

If you visit and their bed is wet, confidently say, "That roof is leaking again!" Now they either think they didn't wet the bed or you're stupid. Either is a win for them. If you see that their pants are wet, quietly whisper, "You must have sat in some water. I think I know where some pants are to change into." You could also act like you don't even notice and then whisper your findings to a staff person on the way out.

You can also avoid confrontation by taking the blame upon yourself and repeating these words over and over again. "I'm sorry, I forgot." "I'm sorry, it's my fault." "I'm sorry. You are right." How can they be mad at a person who is sorry? Whether you have something to be sorry for or not, isn't the issue. The issue is taking the blame off them every chance you get, so they have less stress. When they have less stress they function higher. Just like You!

Universal Reason

Whatever age they are living, we need to give them a reason why they didn't have to do what they think they have to do. Give them a universal reason "why". Something they will believe. The following are questions asked repeatedly. Understand you need to apply each

answer on an individual basis.

Where are my children?

Answer: Your kids are in school. Your kid are taking a nap upstairs. Your kids are at ____'s house.

I have to go to work.

Answer: It a holiday. Its Saturday or Sunday. The boss called and said he wouldn't be in so you are to take the day off. (And it can be Saturday or Sunday every day of the week. Because of the disease they don t know what day it is. That is a Blessing)

I need to go to school.

Answer: It's supposed to storm/snow today, so the cancelled school. It's a holiday or weekend.

Where is my mom?

Answer: At church, in the garden, doing chores, over at _____'s house, she went for a walk, taking a nap.

Where is my husband?

Answer: At work, up town having coffee, out in the field, at the hardware store.

Another very difficult situation is when a person asks where their spouse is and their spouse has already passed away. Again, we need to live their reality. This person would not be asking where their spouse is if he/she didn't think their spouse was alive. Right?!! Imagine if someone told you today that your spouse was dead. What grief, confusion and pain you would feel. Now imagine that you ask that question 20 time a day. It would definitely affect your health, cause depression and decrease functioning ability. I cannot stress enough that you should not tell the person that their spouse has passed away. Instead, think of what their spouse might be doing if they were alive. "Jo is at work." "Jo is out in the field plowing." "Alice is at church." Anytime you can fill in the names of people and what they would actually be doing during the day, your story is obviously more believable. If you don't know the answer to their question, then ask them, "Is your husband a farmer?" A question with a simple yes or no reply. The next time they ask (30 seconds later) you have a believable answer.

Please pass on the answers that worked and didn't work to the staff so we all have the same story. When they get different answers (stories) to their questions, they will easily become suspicious and out answer isn't worth much. Assure them that everything is taken care of and the person or thing they are looking for is just fine.

"I want to go home."

Guilt families feel when they hear "I want to go home" sometimes compels them to move a

loved one into their home thinking it will help. Or they might stop visiting altogether, because it's too uncomfortable. Understand that the home they are looking no longer exists because it is a home from long ago. It could also be the feeling of security and safety a home provides. Even if you took them home, they will still want to go home. The best thing we can do is to help them feel safe and comfortable for the moment in the place they need to live.

Possible responses:

Answer: Give them a reason to stay just a little bit longer. Most people can stay in a place just a little bit longer. They will get pretty upset if you tell them this is their home now. So in the morning you can say, "Stay for breakfast. They serve good food here." In the afternoon, you can say, "They are going to be singing in a little while. I know they could use your voice." At night, "Your mom just called and said you could stay for the night. They have a bed all made up for you."

Answer: Distraction-Do you live on a farm or in town? How many children do you have? It's really chilly out today. Sing their favorite song.

Answer: Support-Your brother will pick you up at _____. No one really is picking them up but give them the hope that someone will be here soon. Your answer sounds something like this, "Bob is picking you up at 10:00" and then at 10:0, "Bob is picking you up at 12:00." "Bob is picking you up at 2:00" and so on. They can stay for a few more hours. But if you tell them the truth..."Bob isn't coming till Tuesday to take you out for lunch." They cannot stay until Tuesday. That is too long to be here and they have got so much to do. (FYI-If they haven't lost their short-term memory and are waiting at the door to be picked up, you should not use this response.)

Answer: Magic words-"I understand" or "I would feel the same too" or "I'll do whatever I can to help". Having reassuring body language and tone of voice makes all the difference.

Answer: A reason-"The Dr. want to make sure you are feeling 100% better, so he thought you should stay one more day." In their generation the Dr. was put on a pedestal and was not usually questioned.

Typically around 3:00 it's time to go home because in their truth they need to get home for dinner. You need to give them a reason to stay. For instance you can say "Stay for supper. They made a special meal for you." If they need more reassurance or are worried others will wonder where they are, you can add, "I spoke with _____ and she said it was fine for you to stay."

Keep your answers as short and simple as possible. Usually if you get longer than two sentences you will lose them and have to repeat yourself. Just think about the simplest

answer that would make them feel OK to stay “here” for a little while longer. If your answer doesn’t work, keep changing it until you find the one that does work. Answer when you find the answer that works, tell everyone! It is a treasure!

It’s Time to Move

To ease the adjustment of moving, we strongly advise you to move everything prior to your family member’s arrival. Take the person to a park or country drive while other people move their belongings. The goal is to reduce as much stress that comes with moving. Before you move anything, take a picture of the person’s current bedroom and living room and then arrange the new room and decorations as closely as you can to their previous home. If they have lost their short-term memory, you may want to make it seem like staying here is temporary. For example...”Just for the winter, until the Dr. says you are in perfect health, just for a little while etc.” The positive aspect of this disease is the person can live in a place for 2 years and think they have been there for two days because of their short-term memory loss.

Any move is very difficult for them and expect it to take at least 6 months to adjust to a new place. They are likely to be angry for a while and who wouldn’t be under the circumstances. Know this is a phase and it will get better. Also know you are getting the worst of the situation. When you aren’t there, they may actually doing pretty well, but when you visit all you get are the negatives. If this is the case, ask staff what they are observing. The answers may surprise you and more importantly reassure you.

Another hint is avoid the statement “you are here so they can take care of you.” For the most part people with Alzheimer’s don’t think they are sick. So a better response in order to leave on a positive note, “She would love to hear about your doll collection.” Or “He knows a lot about _____ too.”

When deciding what to do or not to do, watch their facial expressions to see if you created a positive or negative reaction. If the person has a negative reaction, this tells you change your answer. You keep changing your answer until you find the one they are OK with. You can do this because they have short-term memory loss. Your goal is to find the answer that makes them feel safe and secure in the place in which they have to live. You are not shooting for the perfect reaction, you just want to get the best reaction possible under the circumstances.

It’s OK to make mistakes. Mistakes are treasures too because it teaches you what not to do. You can make mistakes all day long and know tomorrow you get to start fresh because they don’t remember the mistakes you made yesterday.

Another quick hint to ease the transition is to introduce the person to the other residents as if they were your friends (which eventually they will be).

Creating a Safe Haven

Decorate with items that define who this person is, so when anyone enters their room, they see a unique human being and instantly know something valuable about this person. What are their hobbies, favorite pastimes? What subjects do they know a lot about? What items are they familiar with? By filling their life with what makes them a unique individual, memories will flow when they enter their room because it is filled with things they love and recognize. The staff will also know something important about them as soon as they walk into their room and be able to give them their history back many moments though out the day.

For instance, if the person loved to fish, you might place pictures of fish on the wall, bring in a fishing pole, a fishing net and place a tackle box in the corner with fishing lures (hooks removed), string, etc.

Another example might be a person who loved to make quilts. Place a beautiful quilt on her bed or on the wall and let her bring in her sewing box with yarn, string, fabric pieces, pin cushion (without pins), patterns, and measuring tape. They can no longer make a quilt, but they can still feel fabrics, cut out shapes, look at a quilt that is not finished and talk about the hope to work on the quilt next week.

It's important to keep their significant items in the container they have always been in and place them in their room in the location where they would think to find them.

Instead of selling their belongings at a garage sale, donate the "stuff" to a facility. You can easily bring moments of joy to other people who love to fish or sew.

Other items that are essential to create familiarity in their room would be their favorite chair (no matter how ugly), dresser, their own bed, familiar bedspread, significant possessions that trigger memories and "stuff" that offers comfort. Please do not go out and buy new furniture or decorations to make the room "beautiful", as they will not recognize this as "their" room. Old familiar items are comforting...new beautiful things belong to someone else. The items you hang on the wall should be hung 5 feet and below or wherever their line of vision is. They should be able to see and touch their belongings. Also think about the room they enjoy most to be in: the living room, the bedroom, the garage and how can you incorporate the same feeling, same things into their environment. Another hint when deciding what to bring is to observe their "habits of a lifetime". For example, what to bring for bed supplies? Ask yourself do they like 1 or 2 pillows, feather pillows or regular pillows, lots of blankets, do they identify with a quilt or a plain comforter for their bedspread. This observation will help you decide what items to bring. Each person is different.

By filling their life with significant items, you are reminding them of who they are. These items you bring may get lost, damaged and used by other residents because 15 residents have 15 rooms. They cannot remember which room is theirs, or what stuff is theirs because

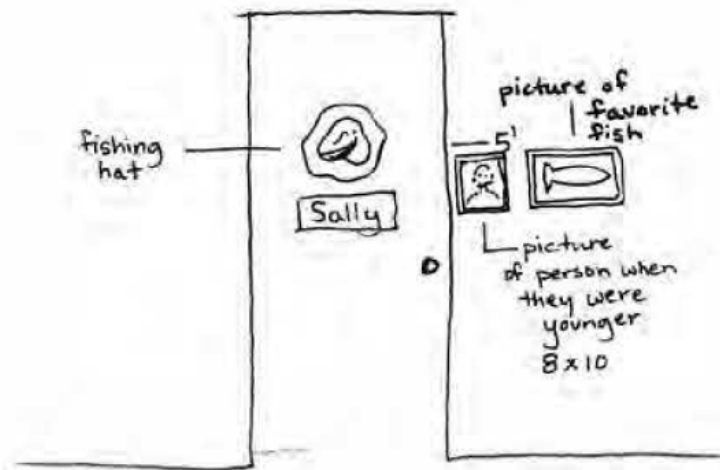
of short-term memory loss and that is the beauty of an Alzheimer's specific "home". You can have three people in the same room; one person sleeping on the bed, the other rummaging through the closet and the third person tearing a piece of paper in the middle of the room. Each person is enjoying his or her own world in the same room.

Allowing them to have the freedom to wander and explore all corners of their home is a simple joy.

Distinguishing Their Door

It is very difficult for people to find their doors and rightfully so because all the doors look alike. To distinguish their door from all the others you should hand on or beside the door items they are attracted to. If they fly airplanes, hang a picture of their favorite airplane. If they like a certain actor, hang his portrait. Their person's name or signature should be about 4 feet up on the door. An 8x10 portrait of the person when they were in their 20's could be hung to the side of their door.

Below is an example door of someone who enjoys fishing.



If you see someone wearing your Dad's fishin' hat, smile, because the hat is now bringing joy to two people.

Just to Know

Valuable Items-Please do not bring in items that hold great value to you but instead replace those significant items with something that looks a lot like the "thing" they treasure. Wedding rings in particular. Whether to let them keep their wedding ring or not will depend on many factors. Have they lost a lot of weight so the ring might easily fall off their finger...therefore risk losing it? Does the staff observe the person hiding their ring for safe keeping never to find again? Is the person giving away their ring to a complete stranger sitting next to them and not understanding its value? If your answer is yes to these questions, we recommend you replace the ring with one that looks a lot

like it. On the flip side...are they crying and rubbing their hands together in search of their ring? Do they comment often about their husband? Do they talk about their ring when someone asks about it? If the answer is yes, then maybe they should keep their ring or replace it with a less valuable wedding band. Many facilities work effortlessly in finding lost items. They find them in the strangest places or sadly unable to find them ever again. Please help us so this does not happen to you. REPLACE whatever it is of value to you.

TV-Unless your family member has a “habit of a lifetime” watching certain TV shows, we encourage you **not** to bring one. For people with Alzheimer’s or dementia, what is happening on TV is happening to them. For example, families talk about how their parent insists they come over and get these people out of her house. When they get there, no one is in the house, but the TV is on. TV for the most part is noise and *usually* adds to the person’s confusion. If they do like certain shows, video tape them without the commercials and have them watch the videos over and over.

Telephones-Telephones are not recommended either because whenever they see the phone, they are triggered to use it, not remembering they just called you 3 minutes ago. This will add stress to your life and it is more important for you to get back involved with the activities that bring you joy. If you have already given them a phone and now want to remove it, one way to do that is to say, “Your phone isn’t working correctly, let me get it fixed for you.”

Significant Items to Replace

Avoid pictures from recent past. Because of their short-term memory, they will not recognize these pictures. Unless of course, it is a picture of a grandchild...every person loves pictures of babies and kids. What we want you to do is find their old pictures (their children when they were children, a picture of their mom and dad, a picture of a childhood pet). We suggest you keep the original pictures and Xerox a copy and enlarge these same pictures and insert them in a pretty picture frame.

The key is to write under each picture what are the names of the people in the picture and the story behind the picture. Get the story directly from the person with Alzheimer’s if possible. With that visual information, anyone who enters their room will be able to trigger that person’s memory and history by just reading the description and talking about the picture.

Another suggestion is to create a memory box. A box that holds significant items that trigger fond memories. For example, pretty scarves, jewelry, pictures, figurines, a collection of something, letters and the list could go on forever. The purpose of the box is to assist others who enter the person’s room to be able to pull out items and trigger memories so they are able to get to know the person on an individual basis.

Give back purses and wallets if the person is aware that it is missing. This provides a sense

of possession and control. Although, you should bring 5 purses or wallets because these items are easily misplaced or hidden. Include items they have always carried with them.

Purses-plastic cards, handkerchief, compact, lipstick, old check book, comb/brush, jewelry, change purse, driver's license, current facility address and phone #, pictures of grandchildren and family, pictures of pets, etc.

Wallets- \$4, triple AAA card, military I.D., insurance card, driver's license, active member club card, current facility address and phone#. In addition, handkerchief, pocket change, keys, or a watch on a chain.

Clothing

First understand people with dementia may no longer be able to recognize their own clothing. Therefore, they tend to wear other people's clothes and/or misplace their own. For this reason, we ask that you label all clothing and personal items with a permanent marking pen. Keep in mind when you visit, they may have someone else's clothes on or someone else may be wearing their clothes. Understand that it is very difficult for them to get dressed once...so we hope you will **not** insist on changing their clothes, but know that we will gather clothes after they go to bed and return them to their rightful owner.

The person with dementia may also like to wear the same outfit every day. If they are living during the depression in their mind, it makes perfect sense because they **did** wear the same outfit every day. Also realize because of their short-term memory, they have forgotten they wore the outfit the day before. They choose the same outfit because they like that outfit. This is your chance to buy seven outfits that look like the one they like to wear. If they won't accept it because of how much you paid, tell them it was a bargain and you couldn't pass it up. They are reliving the depression in their mind and are very conscientious of spending money.

Also know things get lost OFTEN...this is just part of the disease. That \$130 sweater you bought them yesterday may be lost tomorrow. Another resident has picked it up, your mom forgot where she took it off, or someone else may be wearing it. Items you bring will get lost (glasses, purses, jewelry, one shoe, etc.).

Please help by not asking staff to spend hours looking for these things. They will make a note of it and as soon as it is found will put it back where it belongs.

Label everything!

What Clothes to Bring

When considering how much and what clothing to bring, keep in mind the specific need of your family member. For example, if your family member is usually cold and likes to wear sweaters, then you should bring more sweaters. Elastic waists are helpful because then the person can still wear the same clothes even if they have weight gain or loss. They are also

easier to put on and take off.

Provide a wardrobe that can be mixed or matched, but avoid bringing anything that requires dry cleaning. Choose the clothes they like to wear because what they are wearing absolutely affects their mood. If they are reliving growing up on a farm, they may feel more comfortable in overalls and boots. If they have always worn dresses, you probably won't include any pants.

The following is only a suggestion for the amounts of clothing to provide:

Women:

8 underwear, 5 bras or T's, 5 slacks, 5 blouses or dresses, 1 bathrobe, and 8 pairs of socks (socks should be same color and style that the person likes so it is easy to keep separated from other resident socks). Additional items include 3 sweaters, 2 pair of slippers (the same kind and color), 1 heavy or light weight coat (depending on the season), and 2 pairs of walking shoes. The shoes should also be the same in case one is lost. They should have a simple sole, slip-on shoe that are comfortable and can be washed frequently. On another note, if a lady has always worn a shoe with heels or a man has always worn work boots, then disregard above information and bring the shoes they are used to wearing.

Men:

8 underwear, 5 undershirts, 5 slacks, 5 shirts, 2 belts or suspenders, 1 bathrobe and 8 pairs of socks (socks need to be the same color and style to keep separate from other resident's socks). Additional items may include 3 sweaters or vests, 2 pair of slippers, 1 heavy or light weight coat (depending on the season), and 2 pairs of walking shoes (avoid tennis shoes with side soles and laces because they may cause the person to rip. Instead, buy simple sole, slip-on walking shoes that are comfortable and can be washed frequently).

LABEL EVERYTHING!

Making Visits Easier

Deciding to move your loved one into someone else's care can be very emotional. However, once you make this move, hopefully you will take time to rejuvenate yourself and then prepare for quality visits with your friend or family member. You can maintain a quality relationship with a little patience, preparation and creativity.

This one is difficult, but strongly encouraged. Avoid saying, "Hi Mom." As soon as you say "Mom", their wall may go up because they are thinking "You are too old to be my daughter." They will be polite to you for about 10 minutes but then they will be ready for you to leave because they don't know who you are. Instead address them by their first name and you are just visiting.

- Avoid saying things like...“I am your daughter, do you remember me?” It is difficult when they don’t remember you, but it is more difficult for the person to be confronted with the fact that they do not know you.”
- When visiting, ask questions about yourself...“Your daughter, Emily, does she like to play the piano?” You may find out things you never knew before about yourself.
- Share with your family member the events that are happening in your life. Avoid focusing on who’s who and when, but instead focus on the positive information of an event. Also avoid subjects that would make the family member upset or sad.
- Don’t rush your family member. Allow him/her enough time to respond to questions or directions. Keep statements simple and as short as possible.
- Plan activities ahead of time and be flexible according to your family member’s mood. If planning an outing, be sure to keep it simple with little stimulation. Maybe it’s just going for a drive in the country, walking in a park or having a picnic in a quiet area. The fewer people involved and the simpler the tasks, the more enjoyment you and your family member will have.
- If your family member is in the later stages of Alzheimer’s and doesn’t recognize you as his wife, but thinks your daughter is his wife, this tells you he feels he is 20 to 30 years old (which is part of the disease). Don’t focus on this being negative; instead talk about the fond memories that happened when he was 20 or 30 years old. Remember the good times in life.

“Alzheimer’s cannot take away what has already been. It only transfers responsibility of remembering to those who love them.” From Natasha’s letter to her grandfather.

- If your family member becomes anxious or upset, remain calm and assist them to a quiet place, away from stimulating areas like the dining room or activity room. Even before you begin visiting with a family member, find a quiet calm place to sit and chat.
- During the holidays, break up your traditions into smaller events. For example, visit in smaller groups, open presents one night, eat the Christmas meal on another night, go to church service as an event in itself, etc.
- Saying good-bye: Give them a universal reason for leaving them. One answer might be, “I need to go to the dentist. No fun! I’ll be back again soon.” This is a place they won’t want to go with you. Here again, “join their journey” and give them a reason for leaving that will make them feel secure with your departure and always reassure them

that you will “be back”.

- Continue to talk with your loved one even if they don't talk back. Continue to visit even if they don't recognize you. You may miss a “moment” if you stop visiting.
- Enjoy your visit because if you are having a good time, so will the person you love.

A gentleman, whose name was Bud, was telling how he took his wife, who has Alzheimer's to the area where they used to go “parking” when they were young and dating. He reached over and touched her cheek and said, “I love you”. She replied, “I am sorry sir, but my heart is for Bud.”

You can look at this as a negative and say, “they don't recognize me anymore” or you can look at this as a positive and say, “they haven't forgotten me”. It's your choice. Over and over we have seen how they don't recognize people today and yet give constant reminders that they have not forgotten you.

Simple Pleasures

Think back when you were a child and all the simple pleasures you found: watching ants build their house, laying under the stars, running out in the rain, licking a lollipop, eating ice cream, walking through tall grass, finding a new flower, searching for beautiful rocks; simple pleasures we need to relive again. A simple pleasure for an older person might be those things and it might be having their hair combed slowly, getting a back rub or deep massage, rubbing lotion into their hands, having someone gently brush their teeth, eating with a friend; the list is endless.

Focus on simple pleasures, it's not spending hours organizing a big party or buying the person a whole new wardrobe. It's all about fulfilling basic needs to the fullest. It's about quality, not quantity.

Its' as simple as cleaning someone's glasses. You will be amazed by the gratitude you receive from that simple act. It's truly a gift, especially in the last stages of Alzheimer's, to understand the importance of simple pleasures.

This lady, whose mom had Alzheimer's, stated how it would make the visit easier if she had something to give her mom as a gift when she came in. This same lady didn't have a lot of money to spend on gifts, so she got creative. When she left her mom after visiting, she would sneak something of her mother's and then give it as a gift the next day. It was even as simple and wonderful as taking her mom's underwear and washing them just to bring back the next day. It is the friendly gesture that will make it easier and quicker to warm up to one another.

Conclusion

One last helpful hint that family members have passed on...take the word "no" out of your vocabulary. This greatly reduces your chances of arguing with the person who has Alzheimer's. Arguments only cause stress for both parties.

It is difficult to "let go". Especially if you are the person who has cared for your loved one nonstop. Fact is, in order for you to give 100% to your loved one, you have to give 100% to yourself first. When you decide to allow someone else to take care of your loved one, there is a role change. You can once again assume the role of spouse/child as opposed to a caregiver role. For many family members, it is a relief simply being the spouse or son or daughter once again.

Some of these things you have read will work and some won't work. Rule of thumb is that if it works, it works...don't question how you got there. The understanding and solutions are like finding a needle in a haystack sometimes, but keep trying to find the needle. Because once we understand and accept why they do what they do, then we have more energy to find solutions instead of dwelling on the problems.

We do not expect you to jump right in and accept everything. It is going to take some practice and mistakes will be made. You are human, with human emotions. But we hope you will learn, just as we are learning every day.

There are blessings in this disease. You just need to be willing to look for them. This is not an easy road you are traveling but you must make the most of the road...there is no detour or map, just helpful signs along the way to ease the journey.

Great moments often catch us unaware...beautifully wrapped in small packages.

Create a Moment....

Sneak the chocolate in your pocket ~ recite their favorite poem ~ laugh along ~ bite into fresh strawberries ~ whistle a tune ~ talk about going fishing ~ ice cream~ ice cream ~ ice cream ~ go for a walk ~ bring a *jar* of pickles ~ seek shade ~ turn off the TV ~ dance ~ **watch the birds** ~ picnic in a park~ **bring fried chicken** ~ re-read the classics ~ **play the piano**~ **sing out loud** ~ hold **hands** ~ **talk to them even if** they don't talk **back** ~ **smile a lot** ~ **catch a firefly** ~ **talk over an old fishing lure**~ **share a funny story** ~ **drink lemonade together** ~ **buy their favorite music** ~ **sing them to sleep** ~ come to **them with a joke** ~ **bring a cheeseburger** ~ **help them write a letter** ~ **send mail** ~ send **a simple surprise package (just to open)** ~ **rub lotion into their hands** ~ **look** them in the **eye** ~ **stroke their hair** ~ **hug them until they let go** ~ remember the good times for them ~ **notice the clouds**~ **pick their favorite flower** ~ **watch a sunset** ~ **let them watch you fly a kite** ~ **hold a baby** ~ **or hold a doll** ~ **visit outside in the breeze** ~ **snap beans** ~ **notice them** ~ **listen to their stories** ~ **sit in the sun** ~ **say yes A LOT** ~ be more than a daughter~ **just be their friend** ~ **spray their favorite perfume** ~ **stay** with them when they are afraid~ **reassure that you have taken care of everything** ~ be relaxed~ tell them how terrific they **are** ~ **cover their lap with a warm afghan**~ let them take along that worn ugly orange **recliner** ~ **share warm homemade bread** with butter ~ provide a big comfy couch to nap on~ **let them wear their favorite** outfit day after day ~ compliment them (on that outfit) ~ **watch a puppy play** ~ sing a fond hymn over and over ~ learn what they have to teach ~ **use your ears** more than your mouth ~ wave and smile when you part ~ ask for their **opinion** ~ nibble on a gooey cinnamon roll ~ let them be right ~ ask them to help you ~ **thank** them for helping you the best way they know how~ be flexible ~ include them **in** conversations ~ accept them as they are ~ become their advocate ~ make them comfortable ~ touch, feel, talk about their treasured possessions ~ look at old photos ~ share a secret ~ do what they like to do ~ eat a Sunday dinner 3 times a week ~ let them have, let them be, let them.do whatever brings security and comfort ~ love them no matter what

Isn't that what you would want?

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