

Eldercare Answers

July 2009



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Dementias, such as Alzheimer's disease, affect the individuals, their families and their friends. It is sometimes painful to see someone you knew at an earlier part of life, fail to remember or process information logically and rationally. This is especially hard when you know the person was brilliant and full of joy before the disease started to affect their daily living.

Occasionally friends shy away and start to not include the person with a dementia in invitations – sometimes because they don't want a "scene" or think the person will forget to come anyway. If the friend exhibiting signs of a dementia is married, this means the well spouse also starts to feel rejected adding to depression and social isolation for the couple.

How then can you continue to be a friend to someone with an organic dementia? The first action would be to learn about the process your friend is experiencing. That means attending classes in the community that explain the process and give families and friends tools to use in communicating with someone who is challenged with impaired memory or other cognitive processes.

As memory becomes more impaired, the "moment" becomes more important to those with dementias. This means that your invitation to take a walk, visit

Being a Friend to Someone with Dementia

a beautiful public garden or art gallery might be well received because the only expectation is to view and enjoy. The individual will not be challenged in passive experiences that rely on memory to participate. Taking someone to a drama or film that requires short-term memory to follow the thread of the story could cause anxiety or increase confusion.

However, sometimes nature films and pure musicals (the old ones) can bring pleasure. If you do bring someone with a dementia to a live performance or concert, you might think of leaving at intermission, especially if you see they are restless. If you do leave early make an excuse about yourself. Always protect their self-esteem. Or just leave and say it is time to get ice cream.

Going out for a meal can be a nice "in the moment" experience. However, don't give someone with dementia the menu. Choices are very difficult for those with dementias. Instead say, "lets go out for a nice Cobb Salad or let's get some spaghetti tonight." That way, when you arrive, you just say to the waitress, "we have decided what we want; we don't need a menu!" If you do give them a menu, make some suggestions that you know they like and say something like, "I am going to have a ½ tuna salad and the soup of the day, would you like that too?" It is important to protect self-esteem and not leave your friend feeling that they are a failure. The more you

pre-plan your event, the more likely everyone will feel good about the time spent together.

Learning how to communicate with someone with a dementia is an art and often very challenging for those who are concrete in their thinking and used to explaining or rationalizing. This is why we suggest taking classes and learning the important tools in order to be supportive as you change the way you communicate. Explaining a concept to someone many times only increases their sense of failure. Keeping information simple and reducing choices will allow you both to enjoy the moment.

With memory loss, you don't have the past and are not engaged in the future. You only have the moment. For the individual experiencing memory loss, that can mean they are not experiencing guilt for the past or anxiety for the future. When we are in the moment we are most present for ourselves and others – this is a wonderful lesson that contributes to life satisfaction and can be taught to us by those experiencing this challenging journey.

Being a Friend to Someone with Dementia List

1. Select passive activities that are "in the moment"
2. Eliminate choices with planning
3. Protect their self-esteem
4. Sign up for our free Dementia classes at (866) 760-1808

Help!

Need help? Read Care Manager tips and share stories on our new interactive Blog at EldercareAnswers.com



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Walnut Creek, CA 94595

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Eldercare Services has offices in Marin, Oakland, San Francisco and Walnut Creek, CA. Visit us on the web at <http://www.EldercareAnswers.com> for more information.

Community Classes

Walnut Creek

Caring for an Aging Family Member
Friday, July 17, 2009 from 9 AM to 3 PM

Hands on Caring
Friday, July 24, 2009 from 9:30 AM to Noon

Dementia – In the Thick of It
Friday, August 21, 2009 from 9 to 11:30 AM

San Francisco

Families Dealing with Dementia
Wednesday, September 9, 2009 from 5:30 to 7:30 PM
and
Saturday, September 12, 2009 from 3 PM to 5 PM

Class Registration: Please call at least 3 days ahead
At the Glen Park Library

Support Groups

When concerns for aging family members are part of every day life, or when they interfere with work, your health or other relationships, you need to join a support group.

Caring for An Aging Family Member

2nd Thursday of every month from 7 to 8:30 PM
1808 Tice Valley Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94595

1st Tuesday of every month from 6 to 7:30 PM

605 A Cheney St., San Francisco, CA 94131

Cost for Support Groups and Classes: None

Support Group Registration: Not required

For more information regarding classes and support groups, please call (925) 937-2018, (415) 469-8300 or email us at info@EldercareAnswers.com