

Tips on Interacting with Persons with Alzheimer's Disease and other Dementias

- In your interactions with the person try to:
 - Be calm and reassuring
 - Speak slowly and distinctly
 - Use simple words
- Remember that the person is dealing with:
 - Confusion
 - Anxiety
 - Loss of self-esteem
 - Irritability
 - Feelings of depression (when he is aware of his impairment)
- Before asking the person to do something, address him by name to get his attention. While you are speaking, maintain eye contact to help maintain his attention. Nonverbal gestures help in communicating to the person what you want him to do.
- Ask only one question at a time and give the person time to respond. If he doesn't seem to understand, repeat the question using the same wording. If this doesn't work, after a few minutes try to rephrase your question. (This will require that the person process new information.)
- Approach the person from the front. It may startle and upset him if you touch him unexpectedly or approach him from behind.
- Allow the person adequate time to respond in conversation or when performing an activity. Rushing the person will increase his confusion.
- Use humor whenever possible, though not at the person's expense.
- Always remember the importance of love and affection. Sometimes holding hands, touching, hugging and praise will get the person to respond when all else fails.

- The feelings expressed in your voice when speaking to the confused person are as important as the words you say.
- Likewise, the feelings expressed in the person's voice or gestures are often more important than their words.
- Try to maintain a regular daily routine. A person with Alzheimer's has difficulty coping with change. A structured routine will help the person maintain his abilities. It may also save you time and energy.
- Involvement with his daily tasks helps maintain the person's self-esteem. Also disruption in the person's usual habits may result in his no longer being able to perform that activity. For example, if you begin dressing the person, he might soon forget how to perform this function.
- Keep your expectations of what the person can do realistic, given his degree of impairment. There will be less frustration on both your parts if expectations are realistic.
- Break down all tasks into simple steps. Tell the person one step at a time what to do. Too many directions at once, or directions given too quickly, will increase the person's confusion. If the person gets upset and becomes uncooperative, stop and try again later.
- When the person wakes up from a nap or a night's sleep, he may be more disoriented than usual. Expect this and be prepared to orient him through general conversation.
- Don't disagree with made up stories. Respond with affection and assurance to the feeling they are demonstrating (which is real) and avoid trying to convince them that they are wrong.
- If the person mumbles incoherently or rambles, attempt to reduce this by redirecting him with an activity.
- Be consistent. If you say that you are going to do something, follow through with it.
- If the person repeatedly asks a question, remember that he can't remember the answer you have just given him. Instead of answering the question a second or third repetition, reassure the person that every thing is fine and that you will be with him and will help him.
- Repeating the same act may be meaningful for the person and provide relief of tension. For example, the person may spend 20 minutes contentedly wiping the kitchen counter. If the activity doesn't seem to be upsetting the person, let him continue. If it upsets you, gently redirect his activity by giving him something else to do.

- If the person is upset, but can't explain verbally, trying to get them to explain may only exacerbate their feelings. Instead, offer comfort and reassurance.
- If the person is suspicious, you need to understand that this is not behavior the person can control. Also, to confront or argue about the truthfulness of the complaint can be extremely detrimental. Following are several ways to deal with suspicion:
 - Try to distract the person from their focus or suspiciousness.
 - Respond with sympathy and reassurance to the feeling of loss and confusion.
 - If suspicion focuses on theft, you may help the person search for the lost item.
- When delusions and hallucinations occur, react calmly so that you do not further upset the confused person. Avoid denying the experience, direct confrontation or argument. This will further upset them. Remember, the experience is real to them. At the same time you should not play along with a delusion or hallucination. You don't need to agree or disagree—just listen
- ...or give a noncommittal answer. You can say "I don't hear the voices you hear, but it must be frightening to you." Sometimes distraction or a gentle touch will work.
- When a confused person finds himself in a new place he may feel that he is lost, that you cannot find him or he is not supposed to be where he is. Reassure him about where he is, why he is there, and what time the family member will pick him up. For example, "You are at the day center, Sally will pick you up at 4 p.m."
- Make the person feel welcome by talking with him or touching him.
- If you must restrain a person-or go after him, try to distract, rather than directly confront him. Sometimes a warm, empathic, third party can develop an alliance with the participant.
- When the person becomes angry, respond calmly. Do NOT respond with anger. Remove the person from the situation or remove the upsetting stimulus. Look for the event that precipitated the reaction so that you can prevent or minimize a recurrence. Distraction is helpful.
- Keep confusion, noise and extra stimulation down to minimum.
- If the person is misinterpreting things, you may be able to help by explaining what she sees or hears. Do not contradict (e.g., "That noise is the moving curtains," rather than "No, there is not a man in the bedroom.")
- Always remember, the person with Alzheimer's disease is a person first and foremost. Like you, the person needs lots of love, dignity and respect.