



The Challenge of Caring for an Individual Living with Dementia During COVID-19

STRATEGIES FOR CAREGIVERS

1. Promptly evaluate and treat behavioral symptoms. This is even more important than ever because doing so will help protect caregivers from burn out.
2. Build a caregiving team/expand the caregiving team
3. Learn and utilize optimal communication approaches when caring for a person with dementia.
4. Create an optimal environment that includes structure and activities.
5. Use community, online resources, and other technologies to their fullest:
 - Online resources and learning modules
 - Assisted living communities
 - COVID-19 adaptations have been made which allow safety to be maintained in spite of COVID-19 e.g. video visits

CREATE A CAREGIVING TEAM

- Share the caregiving burden with as many family members & friends as possible to help protect from stress related illnesses or burn out
- Make a list of family members (and friends and neighbors) who are willing and able to help and what special skills and talents they possess.
- Give family members specific tasks or assignments that, when possible, use their strengths and talents. Examples include: Preparing meals, running errands, walking the dog, mowing the lawn, doing laundry
- Assign out-of-town family members tasks that do not require them to be geographically close to the patient:
 - Using email to keep all those interested informed
 - Set up a phone tree for efficient communication
- Caring for a family member with dementia can be extremely stressful. Habits of behavior and communication between family members may be intensified by the stress of the situation.
- Periodically solicit feedback and offer praise and thanks

RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO BEHAVIOR CHANGES

- Behavior changes are a form of communication.
- When a person with dementia experiences a change in behavior the first goal is to determine the meaning or message being communicated.
- Sometimes the meaning or message will be simple or obvious but sometimes it may take a while to understand.
- Even though we are living through the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals living with dementia remain vulnerable to behavioral problems and the triggers for behavioral symptoms remain the same.
- Remember that the emotions and stress of a caregiver will likely be passed to the person who is living with dementia.

- Encourage all involved family members to become as educated as possible about their loved one's dementia, and their preferences and needs
- Encourage care giving family members to attend virtual support groups
- Do not hesitate to set limits if a particular family member is saying or doing things that hurt more than help
- Monitor each care giving family member for signs of physical or psychiatric illness or burn out
- Establish clear lines of authority and communication
- Utilize online courses on how best to communicate with and assist someone who has dementia (e.g. Teepa Snow teepasnow.com)



IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

- Make one request at a time
- Speak clearly and slowly
- Allow time for the patient to respond
- Maintain eye contact
- Assume a comfortable posture with arms and hands relaxed
- Identify the patient's affect and verbalize this for him/her
- Time communications optimally based on circumstances (e.g. hunger, fatigue, background noise, etc.)
- Remember that even when words may no longer convey meaning, volume, rate, and melody of speech may still convey information
- The need to be seen, heard and understood is a part of human nature and does not disappear simply because someone is living with dementia
- Putting a thought, need or emotion into words for them can sometimes be powerfully helpful
- Someone living with dementia may have preserved emotional intelligence
- Strive to avoid triggering feelings of shame

WORKING WITH CAREGIVERS FOR HIRE TO CARE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

Southern Caregiver Resource Center and Alzheimer's San Diego can assist you to assess the qualifications of caregivers-for-hire. To be COVID-safe, follow these:

- Contact the home health care provider and learn their protocols to reduce the spread of COVID-19.
- Check the home health care professional's temperature before they enter your home. Anyone with a temperature over 100.4° F should be excluded from providing care.
- Ask health care professionals if they have been exposed to anyone who has tested positive and if so, do not allow them into your home.
- Ensure that the health care professional washes their hands upon arrival and regularly throughout their time in your home.
- Ask the health care professionals to wear a mask.
- Be aware that bringing anyone into your home increases the risk of COVID.

DISTRACTION TECHNIQUES

- Presentation of options: "This door is closed but this door is open."
- A compliment: "My that's a beautiful sweater!"
- A request for help: "Please help me fold these towels."
- Other possibly helpful distractions include: food, drink, music, humor.

HELPFUL ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS

- Arts and crafts
- Baking
- Current events
- Exercise
- Gardening
- Grooming
- Music
- Pets
- Reminiscing
- Singing
- Dancing
- Telling jokes
- Reading
- Card games
- Table games
- Word games including crossword puzzles



HELPING THE PERSON LIVING WITH DEMENTIA FOLLOW CDC COVID-19 GUIDELINES

- Provide extra written reminders regarding important hygienic practices.
- Consider placing signs in the bathroom and elsewhere to remind people with dementia to wash their hands with soap for 20 seconds.
- Demonstrate thorough hand-washing.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol can be a quick alternative to hand-washing if the person with dementia cannot get to a sink or wash his/her hands easily.
- Request prescriptions for a greater number of days than usual to reduce trips to the pharmacy.
- Think ahead and make alternative plans for the person with dementia should adult day care, respite, etc. be modified or canceled in response to COVID-19.
- Think ahead and make alternative plans for care management if the primary caregiver should become sick.