

Dementia Education

Dementia- A general overall term that describes a wide range of symptoms of decline in mental ability that is progressive and may become severe enough that it negatively impacts daily life. Dementia is a progressive disease that impacts the brain, shrinking it over time. This affects the brain and its functionality. Please keep in mind that the disease is taking over the person. Keeping the person separate from the disease will help build empathy and a better relationship, as these symptoms and behaviors aren't intentional (Medline, 2011).

- Damage to brain cells may interfere with the ability to:
 - Communicate
 - Think
 - Feel
 - Behave

Different Types of Dementia

There are over 80-100 different types of Dementia (Medline, 2011). For example, Cancer is a general term that is overarching to specific types of cancer.

Below are symptoms that may be expressed by an individual and may indicate possible Dementia:

- Memory Loss
- Difficulty performing specific tasks
- Word recall
- Disorientation to person, place, or time
- Feeling a sense of paranoia
- Poor judgment
- Misplacing items
- Mood swings
- Changes in personality and behavior
- Becoming passive or withdrawn (Alzheimer's Association, 2015).

While these symptoms are common in most individuals, a noticeable increase in occurrences may be an indicator for Dementia. If you would like to learn more about how the brain is affected you may view this link for an interactive tour from the Alzheimer's Association:

http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_4719.asp

(Alzheimer's Association, 2015).

Well-Being

Implementing and maintaining the 7 characteristics of well-being is valuable to the individual and their health. These characteristics help the person feel fulfillment and dignity as an individual. Also keep in mind the spiritual and cultural beliefs that the individual upholds. Practicing the person centered living model encourages preservation of self. (Kitwood, 1997).

- Identity
- Connectedness
- Security
- Autonomy
- Meaning
- Growth
- Joy

(Powers, 2014)

Communications

Tips for Communication

- Positive verbal and facial cues as a way to interpret interactions
- Benevolent touch
- Approach person from the side or front in a calm manner
- Use a person's name or hand gesture
- Keep it short and simple
- Speak slowly
- Pay attention to your tone and pitch
- Listen with all your senses
- Simplify complexities into steps
- Validate, redirect or distract when signs of agitation arise
- Reminisce
- Apply humor
- Maintain eye contact

Approaches to prevent the individual from feeling incompetent: for example if the person is setting the table incorrectly that person is only trying to help. To the individual it may appear to be the correct and proper way, which makes them feel good about the help they have provided.

- Let's try it this way
- Thank you for your help
- Thank you for helping me, can you place this here....thanks

(Alzheimer's Society, 2012)

Unmet Needs/Behaviors

At times the individual may express some unwelcome fluctuations in behavior. A common behavioral change expressed by individuals with dementia is due to something referred to as sundowning. Sundowning occurs as daylight changes into evening/night, at this time individuals express restlessness, agitation, irritability or confusion. This may continue into the night and the person may have difficulty staying in bed. These behaviors may also be triggered by the individual's environment and/or their inability to express their needs. For example the person may be trying to fulfill a physical need such as thirst, hunger, pain or a bladder/bowel urgency (Family Caregiver Alliance, 2014).

Disrupting one's routine can also create confusion and result in agitation. The same approach may not work every day, you will have to apply different approaches to each situation.

Situations and scenarios that may lead to unwelcomed behavior:

- Make sure the person isn't overstimulated
- Create a routine such as calming music in evenings or saying a prayer
- Someone may be tired so reserve part of the day for relaxation or a nap
- Reduce noise and clutter
- Distract with a favorite object, activity or snack
- Close out light with curtains at dusk and turn on lights so shadows aren't as confusing
- Assess person for pain

(National Institute on Aging, 2013)

Self-Care

Taking care of yourself is just as important as taking care of your loved one. Self-care decreases distress, sadness, and can better your relationship with the individual you are caring for. (Dementia, Caregiving and Controlling Frustration, 2014; Taking Care of YOU; Self Care for Family Caregivers, 2014). Make sure you communicate your needs to family and friends. Become familiar with your own community's outreach, support and programs available to you. Be aware that you are unable to control everything that occurs, and you are doing the best that you can (Helping Friends and Family, 2014).

- If you have any questions, concerns or looking for more detailed information please contact anyone from our Life Enrichment Department at 616-452-1568 or Chris Simmons at ext 224

References and Resources

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