

Talking to Children

A person living with Alzheimer's disease or dementia will experience a variety of changes in their behavior as a result of the physical damage that is occurring in the brain. These behavioral changes can be difficult to comprehend and emotionally draining. For children these changes may be confusing, scary and shocking. It is important to take the time to explain the situation to children. When talking to children about dementia, be sincere but only provide as much information as the child can cope with.

As the behavior of a person with dementia continues to change, children may need reminders of what is happening. They may need to talk about their feelings often. Some of the feelings children go through are:

- Grief at what is happening to the person with dementia.
- Embarrassment with certain behaviors, or irritation with repetitive stories and questions.
- Sense of loss, as the person with dementia is not acting the way they used to.
- Distance from other family members who may be providing care for the person with dementia, as now there may not be as much time to spend with them.

Children may feel nervous to talk about the situation because the person providing care is busy and they don't want to put added pressure on that person. Make sure to set aside time to address a child's concerns around the situation. Here are some other things to consider:

- Try to use language that the child can relate to, attempt to describe what dementia is as clearly and calmly as possible.
- Try to explain the difference between the person and the disease. For a child to be able to separate the person from the disease can help them understand why their loved one may be acting differently than they used to.
- You may not be the only one who needs to talk. Listen to the stories and questions of the child. Ask how the person's illness makes them feel and try to gain insight into what is worrying them.



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- Be patient. Depending on the age of the child, you may need to repeat your explanations on different occasions.
- Be supportive of the child by giving sufficient encouragement and hugs.
- Use Humor. Laughing together can feel like medicine.
- If possible, engage the child in providing care and activity for the person with dementia while ensuring that they carry on with their normal activities.

If talking to children about dementia is something that you are faced with, please do not hesitate to contact the Alzheimer Society of Calgary. We would be more than happy to talk with you about your situation or provide resources that can help.

Sincerely,

Mare

