

Blame Everything on Something or Someone Else

If you must take the car keys away... If they accuse you of stealing from them... blame someone else for the wrong they feel is occurring to them. You do not want to take the blame if you are the main person who takes care of them. You want them to like you so you must portray you are only here to help. If you must take care car keys away because they are no longer safe on the road, call the local police and ask them to do it. If you think someone is stealing their things, say you will call the cops and leave the room. Go get a drink of water or walk around for a while. The important part is that they feel you have heard them and you are going to take care of it. If they blame you for putting them in this facility, transfer the blame to the doctor or a person from their past they don't like, or the bad weather this winter.

If you visit and their bed is wet, confidently say, "That roof is leaking again!" Now they either think they didn't wet the bed or you're stupid. Either is a win for them. If you see that their pants are wet, quietly whisper, "You must have sat in some water. I think I know where some pants are to change into." You could also act like you don't even notice and then whisper your findings to a staff person on the way out.

You can also avoid confrontation by taking the blame upon yourself and repeating these words over and over again. "I'm sorry. I forgot." "I'm sorry. It's my fault." "I'm sorry. You are right." How can they be mad at a person who is sorry? Whether you have something to be sorry for or not isn't the issue. The issue is taking the blame off of them every chance you get, so they have less stress. When they have less stress they function higher. Just like You!



Jolene Brackey, author of "Creating Moments of Joy", is an exciting national speaker who shares many warm, practical solutions to ease the daily struggles related to Alzheimer's and Dementia.

For further resources and information you can visit her at www.enhancedmoments.com.



Understanding the person with
Alzheimer's
By Jolene Brackey

They Lose Their Short-Term Memory

We know people with Alzheimer's lose their short-term memory. This is why they repeat their stories, why they cannot remember what they had for breakfast, or that you visited the night before. Instead of making them utilize their short-term memory, focus on their long-term memory. Instead of asking if someone came to visit last night, talk about that person in general. "Your husband is a hard worker. He sure likes to..."

What about that story they tell you over and over again and you want to say, "You already told me that 10 times!" Please refrain and see the positive side to their story. Think to yourself, this is the story I must remember. As the disease progresses and they lose their ability to communicate, this is the story I can tell them over and over again that will put a light in their eye and possible a smile on their face.

Another situation, which happens frequently, is when you remind them over and over again they have an appointment. When you arrive to pick them up, they say, "No one told me. I am not ready to go." First of all, stop reminding them of upcoming events because they will not remember. Instead, come an hour early and say, "I am here to take you to..." When they say you didn't tell them, slowly recite these words, "I'm sorry. I forgot to tell you. (pause) We still have lots of time. I will help you get ready." Comment frequently after that, "we'll go for ice cream." Ice cream is a magically persuasive word. They are more likely to cooperate for ice cream.

As the Disease Progresses, Their Age Regresses

As the disease progresses, a person with Alzheimer's will get younger and younger in their mind. In other words, they lose more and more of their short-term memory. Early in the disease they may have lost the last 10 years, but as the disease progresses they may lose the last 40 years, the last 60 years and so on. This is why they don't recognize their spouse because in their mind they think they are 25 and their spouse is too old. They may ask where their mom is or want to go to work. If you see them talking to themselves in the mirror, they think they are talking to another person because they don't recognize themselves. That person in the mirror is much older than they are. If they think the reflection in the mirror is someone else and causing a negative reaction, they you will want to remove any mirrors in their room.

First of all, figure out what age they are living. For instance, if they are looking for their spouse but do not recognize their spouse, you can assume they remember they are married which is usually between the age of 20 to 40. If they are looking for their mom, you can assume they are an adolescent. Once you figure out what age they are living, then you need to think about what was significant in their life at that time. Talking about that time in their life can trigger memories you may not have heard before. This is an opportunity to get to know them in a different way because they don't recognize you. Use this new information to create moments of joy for both of you.



A daughter came up to me and started talking about her father who has Alzheimer's. She told me how when she was growing up she was the only girl to three boys. Her father spent the majority of time with the boys so she didn't know her dad well. Today he has Alzheimer's and she is his caregiver. She is getting to know her dad for the first time because he doesn't recognize her as his daughter. But he says her name with tears in his eyes, which tells her he does love her very much.

Triggering Long-Term Memories

For the most part their long-term memories are still there if we learn how to trigger them. So let's begin! The more we incorporate their five senses (touch, smell, visual, sound, and taste) the more likely we are to trigger memories. One of the best ways to trigger memories is with tangible "stuff". "Stuff" that is significant and familiar to them. If they enjoy making things out of wood, bring in their old tools or something they have made and act like you don't know how these tools work but want to learn. Or maybe you just want the story behind the item they made. Whichever the case, you are more likely to get them to communicate if they have something to see, touch, feel, and smell.

Food is another wonderful way to trigger memories. Bring a homemade warm loaf of bread and you are sure to get memories from all the people you share it with. Bring in beans to snap and approach it like this, "I picked all these beans from the garden and was hoping you would help me snap them." They need to feel needed and they also need to see a purpose in what they are helping you with. If you give the project like it is a job they are less likely to enjoy it. If you make it seem like they are doing you a HUGE favor and you thank them for all their help, they are more likely to feel pride and joy from their works. Just donating garden vegetables for the activity person to share with the residents will bring joy to many.

As the disease progresses it becomes more and more difficult for them to communicate so we must change the way we communicate with them. Avoid asking questions that require them to respond with a sentence. Instead turn your question around so all they have to say is "yes or no." For example, "What was your mom like?" This is a question that they must reply with a sentence. It is better to say, "Does your mom have brown curly hair like you?" They are more capable of responding with a yes or no. "Is your mom a hard worker?" "Can she sing?" If they come back with jumbled words and you do not understand what they just said, it is important that you act like you understood everything. Listen to their tone of voice and watch their facial expressions, this will help in understanding them. Also use generic responses like "I didn't know that", "Interesting", "Really?", "I agree". These are magic statements to reassure them you are listening and they are being heard.

"On Mother's Day, I took my mother something special from her past, her mother's purse. It was a small, beaded, cloth handbag filled with keepsakes that belonged to her Mother (who died at a young age, but memories still lingered on in spite of my mom's Alzheimer's). When Mom opened the clasp of the handbag, she found several things inside that she could take out and hold in her hands, tiny gloves, fancy combs that were used in her Mother's hair, ring box with an opal ring, a small envelope and a note inside with her Mother's handwriting, and a small portrait of her Mother and Father.

Very carefully, she took out everything; very carefully she put back everything. She smiled as she did it. She enjoyed smelling and touching everything. For a long time, Mom sat at the table and enjoyed the purse. She laid each thing on the table while we talked about her Mother. Her favorite memory was seeing her Mother brush her long brown hair as she stood in her bedroom in front of the mirror. She brushed it and then arranged it on top of her head using the combs to keep it in place."
Excerpt from *Butterscotch Sundaes* written by Virginia McCone.

It is true that family heirlooms and keepsakes are irreplaceable. It is also true that you should not leave them here because it may get misplaced or hidden. But create a moment of joy by bringing them when you visit and then take them home again. Stuff isn't valuable until it brings a smile to someone's face. Priceless memories "this stuff" triggers for You too!

Join Their Journey

If your family member wants to feed the cattle or they ask you where their husband is, don't try to orient them to the present day by saying, "John, don't you remember you sold your cows 20 years ago" or "Mary, your husband has been gone for 10 years. You are now living at..." These kind of statements can be extremely terrifying for the person with Alzheimer's. Your purpose is to reassure them that whatever or whoever they are looking for is perfectly okay. So instead, respond by saying, "I fed the cattle already today, they are just fine. You have taught me so much about farming" or "Mary, your husband is in the field."

Remember your goal is to say whatever it takes to help them feel safe and secure "for the moment". If you ever wonder if your answer was a "good one" just look at their facial expression and that will tell all. It's okay to make mistakes... they have short-term memory loss and don't remember the answer you gave them two minutes ago. Your mission is to keep changing your answer until you find one that works.

If they have lucidity for a moment and they catch you in a fib, quickly apologize and say you misunderstood. You could also distract by talking about something else. Most importantly, take things lightly. You have a better chance to get a positive response.

Live Their Truth

No matter how hard we try, we cannot bring back their short-term memory. We can, however, take hold of their long-term memory and use it to create moments of joy. This means we need to live in their reality. When they are looking for their mom, think about what their mom did during the day and then use that as your answer so they feel like their mother is okay. For example, "she's out doing chores", "she's in the kitchen making breakfast", "she is doing the laundry", etc. By giving answers that make sense to them, they are able to relax and not worry about where their mom is. Talk about their mom. Find out, maybe for the first time, what she was really like.

It is difficult for people to live their truth, to tell them their mom is doing chores when their mom is really gone, to tell them their horse is in the barn when they no longer have a horse. We don't like doing this because we feel we are lying to them. I reassure you it is not lying but it is "living their truth". No matter how hard you try to bring them to our reality you will lose in the end because they will ultimately think you are lying, trying to hurt them, or you are an imposter.

Maybe it will help if you visualize yourself in their position. You have Alzheimer's but do not remember you do and you think you are perfectly fine. You are actually 85 but think you are 24. You wake up every morning in a strange place. You remember you have children but you cannot find them. You ask a stranger who acts as if they know who you are, "Where are my children?" They tell you the truth... "Your husband isn't visiting until Tuesday. You live here now. Everything will be fine." Your reaction would be, "Everything will not be fine because this is not my home. My children need me. I want to go home!" Does this vision help you understand? More importantly I hope it takes away some of the guilt you feel about "lying".

Bottom line is this... there is no reasoning with a person who has Alzheimer's and you will not be able to make them live your reality. You can fight until you are blue in the face but you will lose in the end. Live their reality and find treasures in their reality. By enforcing their thought pattern, whatever that may be, you have a better chance of going into a more meaningful conversation.

"Meet them where they are and on pleasant terms." Virginia McCone



Stop Correcting Them

Before you correct them on the layers of clothes they are wearing, before you correct their story, before you correct them about being in someone else's room, ask yourself these three questions. **1.)** What they are doing right now, is it hurting me? (not annoying... use the word hurting) **2.)** What they are doing right now, is it hurting anyone else here? **3.)** What they are doing right now, is it hurting them? If the answer is "no" to those three questions, let them do what they want to do. Isn't that what you would want? By correcting them you are only adding stress and agitation to their day. How would you like to be corrected all day long?

Please apply these same guidelines when another person with Alzheimer's is in your mom's room. Is this hurting me? Is this hurting my mom? Is this hurting anyone else? We need to understand the other people here with Alzheimer's are also doing the best they can with the abilities they have left.

When you visit and they are carrying around someone else's stuff or wearing someone else's sweater. (or someone else is carrying around your mom's stuff) Don't correct them... instead say to yourself, that doll must be familiar. I need to go shopping and get her five dolls that look like that one because it brings her comfort. You should ask why you need five dolls... because the doll will get lost, and other people want to hold the doll too.

For the most part, people with Alzheimer's do not think there is anything wrong with them. They are not doing these things to make you upset... they are doing the best they can with the abilities they have left. So let them "be" no matter if it's wrong or right. Let them have what they want to hold whether it is theirs or not. Now you have just assured them that everything is okay. What a comforting feeling to leave them with!

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto... your mom and dad."