

Team Angels



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How To Interact With Someone Who Has Alzheimer's Disease

By: Lisa Riesenmy

The Alzheimer's Association states that more than 5 million American people suffer with Alzheimer's disease, the most common type of dementia. By 2025 that number will rise to over 7.1 million. Every 66 seconds, someone in the United States develops Alzheimer's disease. This progressive disease results in severe memory loss and other brain function abilities that interfere with a person's daily life tasks.

Always speak in a calm, soothing voice, using simple word choices and using the person's name often.

When someone you care about has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, it can become difficult to know how to interact with him or her, especially as the disease progresses. This person, whether you knew them intimately or just socially, has changed, and perhaps you're not sure if they will recognize you anymore. It can become awkward and even a little frightening when you don't know what to say or how to act when living with, visiting or just running into a casual friend who has Alzheimer's disease

It's hard to understand what is going on inside the mind of someone with Alzheimer's. Their entire reality has changed, from their outlook on the past to what they are experiencing in the present. Patience is key in dealing with someone with dementia.

Introduce Yourself

Don't assume that an Alzheimer's patient knows who you are immediately upon seeing you, particularly if you are not a close family member. If the person looks confused upon meeting up with you, say your name to reintroduce yourself. As the disease progresses, even spouses and children will have to do the same. Remember, this person may become frightened if you suddenly come up to them for an embrace if they have no idea who you are. Be open and understanding if you are not recognized.

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Why Music?

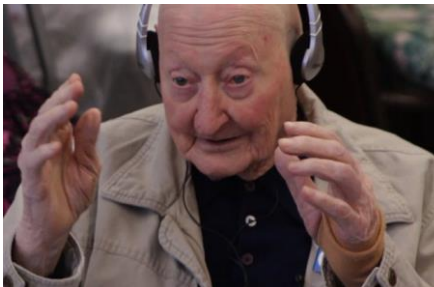
We have joined a network of over 1000 facilities and agencies across 45 states and 8 countries that promote the MUSIC & MEMORYSM Therapeutic program. It is the program's goal to make personalized therapeutic music a standard of care throughout the health care industry. We are presently working with our dementia clients here in the SW Missouri Area providing the therapeutic personalized music in the home and are seeing amazing results.

Why It Works

- The brain ties music to memory
- The personalized therapeutic music enables the listener to reconnect, regain social skills and live more fully

Therapeutic Benefits of Personalized Music

- Finally, a way to give pleasure to persons with advanced dementia
- Offers an enjoyable, fulfilling activity for persons in dialysis, on vent or bed-bound
- Increases cooperation and attention, reduces resistance to care—a real boost for staff morale
- Reduces agitation and sundowning
- Enhances engagement and socialization, fostering a calmer social environment
- Provides a valuable tool for the effort to reduce reliance on anti-psychotic medications
- Provides uplifting positive energy to staff members and family caregivers ♦



“Alzheimer's and dementia patients live in the moment, It is our job to give them as many moments as possible”



Don't Interrogate

Refrain from testing someone with Alzheimer's, asking all types of questions to see what they do or don't remember. This can be extremely upsetting. Simply remind the person about people or events instead of grilling them. State something to help them with recognition, such as “Your son, Jonathan, is here to see you,” when someone comes to visit, rather than saying, “Now who is this person in the doorway? Do you remember him?”

Your Tone and Words Matter

Always speak in a calm, soothing voice, using simple word choices and using the person's name often. Focus on being reassuring and comforting. Try your best not to interrupt when the person is speaking, even if he or she is not making sense. Wait for an answer or response without rushing the person so he or she can process what you've said.

Display Empathy

If the person does not recognize you or someone else in the room, don't become agitated or talk about the person with others as though he or she weren't there. Remember: this is still someone with feelings and they can hear what you are saying and become hurt or embarrassed. Empathize with that person's inability to recognize someone by giving gentle reminders instead.

Bypass Difficult Realities Instead of Adding Stress

Memory, of course, is a hallmark symptom of Alzheimer's. This person may believe that people from the past who are now deceased, for instance, are still alive. If a person with Alzheimer's asks when you can take them to visit their father (who is no longer alive), do not remind them of this fact. Instead, gloss over the request, putting it off until another day. You do not want to agitate someone with dementia.

Arguing is Useless and Distressing

Avoid arguing over a fact that the person with dementia cannot recall correctly. Even if you try to set the record straight with the correct facts, the person will usually not be able to remember it anyway, so why upset the patient by arguing? It will only cause emotional stress.

Remove Distractions Before Conversing

You will want your interactions with an Alzheimer's patient to be as free of distractions as possible. Flip off the TV, the radio and your cell phone so they can focus on you and what you are saying. Don't forget to make eye contact with the patient, using their name when addressing them, before you even begin the conversation.

Don't Make Demands

Try not to give too many instructions. Instead, ask the patient if they can help you with something. This makes them feel they are still being productive and useful. Ask, “Can you help clear the table?” instead of giving commands. Instead of asking, “Do you need the bathroom?” tell them, “The bathroom is over here.”

Overall, the key to interacting with Alzheimer's patients is to be emotionally supportive. Try to take cues from the patient by starting the conversation with a brief reintroduction of yourself and see where it goes from there. ♦

