



Dementia

Living with dementia has a significant social, psychological and emotional impact on a person. Many people with dementia describe these impacts as a series of losses and adjusting to them is challenging. Caring for a loved one with dementia can be very challenging too. In this post we provide you with some practical strategies for handling the behaviour problems and communication difficulties you may encounter when caring for a person with dementia.

Understanding Dementia

Dementia is a progressive biological brain disorder that makes it more difficult for a person to remember details, think clearly, communicate with others and take care of themselves. Dementia can also cause mood swings and change a person's personality and behaviour. When caring for a person with dementia it helps for the carer to understand the impact the condition has on the person. This means understanding how the person might think and feel, as these things will affect their behaviour.

Communication

Having dementia makes it very difficult for a person to complete practical things like communication. A person may have problems finding the correct word or following a conversation. Communication may also be affected by pain, medication side effects and sensory impairments. A person with dementia may start to lose self-confidence or withdraw from social situations due to difficulty communicating.

Independence

They may gradually begin to lose their independence and become reliant on those caring for them. This can be a difficult and frustrating change for all involved.



It is important that where possible, families, friends and care givers assist the person to do things for themselves, rather than 'take over'. This will increase their wellbeing and help maintain their dignity, confidence and self-esteem.

Making decisions

People with dementia may eventually lose the ability to make conscious decisions for themselves (e.g. choices around finances). They should be supported in making decisions for themselves for as long as they are able. If a caregiver needs to make decisions for them, the person's best interests should be considered.

Coping with dementia

Maintaining a positive relationship with a person who has dementia can be challenging. We have compiled a list of coping strategies to help you.

- Try to focus on the relationship as it is now rather than thinking of how it used to be
- If the person finds verbal communication difficult, speak slightly more slowly and use simple words and sentences. Be more aware of the tone you adopt
- Try to maintain eye contact when communicating. This will help the person focus on you
- Listen to the person. Give them plenty of time, remove distractions like background noise and try to work out the meaning they are trying to convey. The message may be about feelings, not just facts
- Do things together - try to do things with the person rather than for them when offering assistance.
- Offer help in a supportive way
- Break down tasks into smaller, more manageable steps

Caregivers: look after yourself too

You cannot pour from an empty cup. Dementia also has a considerable effect on care givers and family members. As a caregiver you are constantly changing to situations and need to adapt to the demands and needs of the person you are caring for. It is important to find a balance between supporting the person's emotional needs with your own. Don't be afraid to seek professional support.

"There is one thing this disease cannot take away, and that is love. Love is not a memory."- Anon