

Alzheimer's Victims and their Needs

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Communication with a loved one suffering from Alzheimer's Disease is often difficult, confusing and heartbreaking. The behavior of that person is a far cry from his or her usual temperament. In order to sustain the relationship and enhance coping abilities, family members and care givers should learn to communicate with the Alzheimer's victim in ways that enhance that person's quality of life.

Learning how to successfully communicate with the Alzheimer's victim may avoid or reduce undesirable behaviors such as agitation and wandering. Here are a few basic techniques to keep in mind.

- Approaching from the front reduces the likelihood of surprise: Surprise may produce fear and disorientation, so it is best avoided.
- Face the loved one as you talk.
- Avoid settings involving unnecessary sensory stimulation. Too much of it may be confusing and impair the ability to communicate.
- If a situation threatens to get out of control, distraction is the best method for diffusing the situation. You redirect his or her the attention by, for example, introducing another activity such as a walk or a drive.
- Speak slowly and in a low-pitch, remembering to ask only one question at a time.

Sometimes, medications are needed for the alleviation of psychotic symptoms, or to enhance memory and cognitive functions. But there is more: other interventions may be introduced by care givers and family members in order to add some quality to the life of the victim.

- Identify areas of satisfaction and pleasure. Enabling your loved one to participate in activities enjoyed for a lifetime may reduce agitation, improve coping ability and increase his or her sense of dignity. For example, if the victim formerly enjoyed gardening or painting, set aside time to participate in those activities in a way both safe and manageable. Other possibilities are being around pets, going for walks, listening to music.
- Watching video biographies is a wonderful way to spend time with an Alzheimer's victim. They are old photographs converted to videotape and narrated by family members. The videos may help reduce agitation during a visit and help spark memory.

The Alzheimer's Disease victim faces, at best, a bleak time of life. Anything the family can do to make it better is appreciated by victim and family alike.