

# ABCs of Dementia

- **Approach** with a positive attitude; from the front with a smile. Address the person with the disease by name.
- **Breathe.** Take a deep breath before the visit/ encounter. The person will read your essence and body language before he or she can comprehend what you are saying.
- **Cue** the person. Instead of asking “Do you want to put on your sweater?” put yours on and offer to help.
- **Dementia** is a general term for a decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life. Alzheimer’s is the most common type of dementia; diagnosed 60-80 percent of the time.
- **Every** day is a new day. A bad day yesterday does not mean a bad day today. Take it one day at a time.
- **Follow** the lead. If the person with dementia wants to tell the same story or wash the same dish over and over again, let them.
- **Give** the person a purpose. Ask for advice or give him/her a task. Even if it is done wrong, the person will feel worthy and useful.
- **Honor** who the person is now—and who he/she was before the disease.
- **Investigate.** If the person is agitated, he/she may not be able to tell you why. Thirsty, hungry, tired, a need to use the bathroom?
- **Joy.** Revel in the joyful moments. Let those moments fill you up.
- **Keep** eye contact. It establishes trust and helps you make a connection.
- **Love.** Give a lot of love. It makes the person feel safe and cared for.
- **Mistakes.** You will make them. You will say and do the wrong things. Forgive yourself—caregiving is a very hard job.
- **Never** argue with the person with dementia. It causes agitation for both of you and makes everything harder.
- **Oxygen.** Like on an airplane, take your oxygen first. Care for yourself. If you are not a strong, healthy caregiver, you cannot be strong for the person with the disease.
- **Practice** patience. It can take someone with dementia longer to understand your question and come up with an answer.
- **Quiet.** TV, radio and several conversations at once make it hard for the person to concentrate. Go to a quiet place to visit or connect.
- **Redirect.** If the person is frustrated or upset, try changing the topic or environment. Suggest a favorite activity or offer some chocolate or ice cream.
- **Simple.** Keep sentences simple to facilitate communication.
- **Talk** about things from the past. Recent memories will fade more quickly.
- **Use** fiblets. “I have to pick up my daughter from school” says the eighty-year-old. “Your daughter called, she is staying late to study with a friend from school.” Let’s go listen to some music...Tell a “fib” and then redirect the conversation.
- **Validate** feelings and thoughts. “Yes, this is Tuesday (even if it’s Friday) but today we are going to do a Friday activity.” Do not tell the person that she/she is wrong.
- **eXercise.** Go for a walk with the person or do chair exercises. Staying active is good for everyone.
- **You** are not alone. The Alzheimer’s Association has many resources to help families, caregivers, and all involved with care on this journey. Reach out.
- **Zzzzzz’s.** Let the person rest. This disease is exhausting...for everyone. Get enough rest for yourself too.