

How to be an expert at caring for loved ones with dementia

As dementia affects more and more senior adults, expertise in dementia care will continue to be a very valuable skill for professional caregivers.

But what does it take to become an expert at providing care for elders with dementia ?

Great question !

In this post, we will uncover 5 skills you can develop to become a dementia care expert.

But first, let's take a moment to fully understand what dementia is.

Dementia is not a specific disease.

It simply describes a constellation of illnesses that cause a general decline in memory and other thinking skills. These changes commonly alter how a person behaves and interacts with his or her environment.

Alzheimer's Disease accounts for [60-80% of all cases of dementia](#) whereas a vascular dementia - a condition that arises usually after a stroke is the second most common root cause for dementia.

Your loved one who has dementia is not "out of their mind" or "crazy".

Dementia is an illness that can affect anybody regardless of their socio-economic status or educational level.

The symptoms of dementia include :

- Memory loss
- Problems communicating or finding their words
- Difficulty reasoning or problem-solving
- Difficulty handling tasks they used to be able to handle easily. They might forget how to start a car for instance even though they have driven for years
- Agitation
- Paranoia
- Hallucinations

Understanding the basis for why dementia happens will make a caregiver more empathetic and understanding of the person you are providing care to.

Redirection

As mentioned above, with dementia comes memory loss and distortions of reality.

Your elderly loved one may suddenly start talking about things that happened years ago as if they happened yesterday, Or, she may not recognize you and call you by a different name.

Redirection is the practice of using non-confrontational language and tasks to change your loved one's direction or behavior. Redirection may simply involve bringing up a beloved family member, or talking about a favorite hobby or pastime.

Your loved one may drift in and out of reality and current time and place. Focus on maintaining your loved

one's independence while creating an environment that is safe and easy to navigate.

Develop unending patience. The person is not the illness but it is important to care for both.

Engage your loved one in their preferred mode of communication

If she doesn't want to use regular words, but wants to sing out her sentences, sing out the sentences with her!

If she is now non-verbal, learn non-verbal ways to communicate with her.

If there is an old song that triggers happy memories for her, play it regularly. Comfortable communication is the key to caring for your loved one with dementia.

It can feel frustrating when she will not speak or communicate with you the way she used to. But using these tactics, will make communication and completing daily tasks like bathing and dressing much easier.

If you are a brand new caregiver, who is new to a particular dementia client, it is important to talk with family members and perhaps other caregivers who are familiar with their case to get a feel for what works and what does not with a particular client.

Whether verbal or non-verbal, everyone craves connection. Therefore, finding the best way to communicate with someone struggling with dementia is immensely important.

Plan activities

Dementia does not mean a person can no longer participate in activities. As an expert dementia caregiver, you will plan activities that allow encourage social interaction.

What did your loved one or client love to do before dementia set in ? If they still enjoy those activities, e.g they liked to play cards and can still play, incorporate those activities into their weekly schedule.

For some patients, activities they used to enjoy may no longer be things they want to be engaged in. If that is the case, find out through trial and error and observation, what their new preferred activities are.

Practice redirection

Instead of vehemently disagreeing with a dementia patient about what is true or not, practice redirection. The art of redirection is not always easy but you can master it over time. Here are a few examples of something you could say to redirect someone with dementia.

Example #1

The lights are off at night and the client or your loved one says, "It is dark. The monsters come at me when the lights are off."

Instead of stating that the "monsters" are not real, a reassuring redirecting statement would be "I see. You know what? We will turn the lights on so you feel safer."

In this statement, you are not reinforcing the fact that there are monsters.

You are however providing a solution that may solve the concern your loved one is trying to communicate - *she is afraid of the dark.*

Example #2

She mentions she would like to fix her 1979 Crown Victoria so she can take it out for a ride this weekend.

The reality: she hasn't owned that 1979 Crown Victoria for 10 years and currently doesn't drive.

A non-combative, redirecting statement would be "Well, let's see what we can do about that tomorrow."

For a lot of dementia patients, disagreeing with their reality can lead to anger, agitation and frustration.

As much as possible, avoid confrontation.

Redirection allows you to acknowledge the need of the client/loved one - which makes her feel understood - while averting attention away from the subject or addressing the real issue behind her communication.

Use supportive touch

Last but not least, as an expert dementia caregiver, use supportive touch.

Massage and touch no doubt help people relax. A gentle touch is a universal sign of interaction and affection.

Great dementia care will involve you as a caregiver providing as much supportive touch as is necessary to help the person feel loved and cared for. Supportive touch also involves caring for your loved one's body by keeping it clean and encouraging regular motion.

Closing Thoughts

Caring for a dementia patient is no doubt a challenge for any caregiver.

However, it is still possible to give great care to people struggling with dementia.

In this post, we have uncovered 5 ways to expertly care for people with dementia.

If you enjoyed this post, please make sure to bookmark it or share it with someone who needs it.