

Parent Quick Sheet

Fast and fabulous ideas for households.

How do I explain dementia to my child?

"God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes but the Lord sees into the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7 This verse is a wonderful reminder that the true identity of persons with dementia is known to God, regardless of outward and bodily changes.

BACKGROUND

Basic Information to tell children

- Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain that might cause a grandparent or other relative to act differently than usual.
- Dementia might affect your loved ones speech and personality as well as their memory.
- It is possible for your loved one to have a good life with dementia.
- Not all older people have dementia, if one relative has dementia it doesn't mean all your older relatives will have one of the diseases.

What children can expect

Here's some information you can share with children about what to expect when someone they know has Alzheimer's:

"Some people with early-stage Alzheimer's may forget words or names, even the names of people they love. Otherwise, you may not notice too many changes. But when you spend time with people with late-stage Alzheimer's, it is easy to see that something serious is going on. Some people with Alzheimer's may cry, become angry easily or behave in ways that embarrass you. Sometimes the person may not remember who you are, even if it is someone like a grandparent who knows you very well."

"People with Alzheimer's disease are not acting like this because they don't care about you anymore. There are changes happening to the parts of the brain that control remembering, thinking and feeling. This is not the person's fault, and they may have good days and bad days."

PULL UP A SEAT

What can I do?

The Alzheimer's Association is the to-go place to get information about children and Dementia. Alzheimer's and other dementias are diseases that affects the whole family, including children — especially when a parent or grandparent is diagnosed. Children and other relatives with dementia experience a range of emotions like sadness, anger, and anxiety, and children may worry about the person's behavior or their own future. Openly and honestly communicating with children about the disease in an age-appropriate way is crucial to support them and build trust.

Children might have questions about what's happening as the disease progresses. It's important to answer these questions honestly and discuss the changes the disease might bring. Depending on a child's age, your approach to talking with them about Alzheimer's will vary. Consider reaching out to a school counselor, therapist or the child's pediatrician for additional support.

Resources

There are many books, videos, resources and appropriate activities to enjoy with someone who has dementia as well as resources and books that tell stories that children can understand. Look for resources that offer:

- Age-appropriate education about the brain and explanations of why something is happening.
- Practical tips that explain how to provide the right support in the moment.
- Notes to parents about how to use the resource to think and talk about dementia.

Teepa Snow, a dementia care specialist, and the Positive Approach to Care (PAC) Team share about dementia so that everyone can understand why changes are happening and how you can support those living with brain change in a more positive and respectful way.

Her children series <https://teepasnow.com/kids-books> on dementia includes:

“Grandma’s Living with Dementia”, “Bad Words and Dementia” and “Shopping and Dementia” (coming soon)

Other notable books and audio recordings:

- *Wilford Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox, 1984
- *Sometimes Even Elephants Forget: A Story about Alzheimer’s Disease for Young Children* by Kathleen Welch, 2019
- *Please Explain Alzheimer’s Disease to Me- A Children’s Story and Parent Handbook about Dementia* By Kathleen Welch, 2019 (available on Audible)
- *GG Forgot My Name: A Family Adjusting to Alzheimer’s* by Cynthia Hughes, 2022
- *Why Can’t Grandma Remember?: A Children’s Book about Dementia* by Crystal Holscher, 2023
- *Grandpa Forgets Sometimes: A Children’s Book about Love, Memories, and Alzheimer’s* by Shelly Asbury, 2025
- More books and resources can be found at the Alzheimer’s Association’s website <https://www.alz.org/help-support/resources/kids/children>

How a child can communicate with a person with dementia:

- Give them your full attention.
- Be aware of your feelings, the tone of your voice and show a loving, friendly face.
- Be patient. Let your grandma know you are listening and show that you care about what she is saying.
- Offer comfort and reassurance. SMILE
- If they say something that is not correct, do not correct. What they are saying is their reality.
- If they get upset or you don’t understand what is happening, go get a parent or other adult.
- Sometimes you might have to talk with your hands.

When you go up to your relative who has dementia remember these tips:

- Come around to their front and say your name.
- Call the person by their name.
- Use short, simple sentences. Ask only one question at a time.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Give them plenty of time to answer you.

These materials were adapted from Dementia Friends Minnesota with permission of Dementia Friends, Alzheimer’s Society, London UK and The Alzheimer’s Association.

And so...

The honesty and love of children go hand and hand with someone who is struggling with dementia. As parents, most of the time you can just let the conversations and reactions flow naturally and all will go smoothly between the child and person living with dementia.