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Help Children Through Love and Education

Alzheimer's disease or dementia of any kind can have a big impact on every member of the family, including children and teenagers. Each child will react differently to someone who has dementia.

Both the 5-year-old and the 15-year-old are going to be alarmed and stressed, and as their grandma or grandpa fade away, they are going to face feelings of grief, loss and fear.

As adults, we want to know all about the disease and how to help our loved ones. Children, however, are often left out of the loop and may also have questions about what is happening.

It is important to take time to encourage these questions and answer them openly and honestly. All of these discussions should be tailored to the child's age and ability to understand and cope with the information. Teens will often play a role in the actual caregiving, so appropriate education is important.

Above all, children need assurance that there will always be someone to take care of them, and that even though grandma may be changing, she still loves them.

Children may also worry that dementia or Alzheimer's is contagious or that their parents may develop the disease; this



is a very scary thought for a child and reassurance can help.

When a family member forgets a child's name it can be very upsetting to the child. Additionally, the person with dementia may show changes in personality or mood that the child may not understand or know how to respond to.

The unique relationship the child has with the person with dementia will have an affect on the way the child copes with the dementia changes. Anger, confusion, sadness and fear are common emotions for children facing this disease in a loved one.

Children can also experience jealousy because of the time you must spend with the loved one, or embarrassment over behaviors. They may feel guilty for showing impatience

with the person. If the loved one is living in the home of the caregiver with a child, feelings can intensify.

Other signs of distress in a child include physical pains such as stomach aches, doing poorly in school, spending more time away from home, or no longer inviting friends to the house.

Remember, this is someone they care about and are probably just as concerned as you are about what is going to happen. It is important to help children know that these feelings are normal. A child or teen having a hard time understanding or accepting the disease may withdraw from or lose patience with the loved one.

Children are amazingly

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Caregiver Tips Activities Children Can Share With Their Loved One

-  Take a walk around the neighborhood
-  Eat a picnic lunch outside
-  Put a puzzle together
-  Bake cookies
-  Listen to old songs and sing together
-  Color or draw pictures
-  Make a scrapbook of family pictures
-  Read a favorite book or story
-  Watch a favorite TV show together
-  Make a Memory Book

Six out of 10 people with Alzheimer's will wander

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more about Alzheimer's or dementia and the brain, and emphasize positive points such as the discovery of new medications or the potential for a cure before they are grown. There are also many age-appropriate books on the subject.

Engaging the child in activities with the person with dementia can help the child feel more comfortable and help preserve their relationship. Tasks such as looking at photos, scrapbooking or working on a puzzle can allow them to spend time together.

Depending on the child's age, allowing the child to help with some of the caregiving responsibilities may give the child a sense of purpose and involvement in the care. Children who can contribute and actively participate in

the care of the loved one will feel a part of the family team and be able to better cope with the challenge.

Children also need to know that this disease is not their fault, or anyone's fault. It's important to explain behavior and personality changes that may occur and reinforce that the child is still loved by the family and person with dementia. Education at an appropriate level can help the child understand what is happening and prepare the child for future changes.

Explaining dementia to children can be challenging, but it is crucial. With love and support, answering questions, providing education and giving them time to work through feelings, children can adjust to the changes of Alzheimer's disease or other dementia.

*Written by
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Helpful Resources:

Books:

- What's Happening to Grandpa?** Maria Shiver. 2004. Preschool to grade 4
- Still My Grandma,** V. Van Den Abeele. 2007. Preschool to grade 3
- Wadsworth Dances the Waltz,** Frances Kakugawa. 2007. Preschool
- Graduation of Jake Moon,** B. Park. 2002. Grade 4 to junior high
- Alzheimer's Disease,** M. Targ Brill. 2006. Grade 4 to high school
- I Miss Grandma.** M. Basso & D. Scarfone. 2011. Photographic edition
- Striped Shirts and Flowered Pants: A Story about Alzheimer's For Young Children,** B. Schnurbush. 2006. Ages 4-8
- It Only Looks Easy,** P.C. Shallow. 2003. Ages 8-12

Brochure:

- Brain Basics: Know Your Brain,** National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. Free, at ninds.gov
- Shadowbox Press Books:** shadowboxpress.com. 2011. Interactive books for communication with the memory impaired.

Alzheimer's Association, Just for Kids and Teens Videos for Kids & Teens. alz.org