Keeping up appearances

Self-respect and self-confidence are crucial to maintaining a positive attitude. Personal hygiene, the right clothes and looking nice all contribute to the way we feel about ourselves. Some people with dementia simply forget if they have bathed, shaved or brushed their hair and might need a gentle reminder.

Loss of independence can be particularly hard to deal with, and providing assistance for certain tasks may be difficult to accept. Everyone finds a well-aimed compliment, genuinely delivered with a smile, an ego boost. Simple steps like leaving out clothes in the order in which they are put on, replacing buttons and zips with velcro fastenings and suggesting slip-on shoes rather than lace-ups may help to reduce tension.

Feeling angry

Many people with dementia and carers have expressed how angry, frustrated and humiliated they sometimes feel. Aggression can be a natural response to loss of power and the fear of losing more. Understanding this and not taking it personally may help to restore calm.

Name

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I enclose an (optional) donation of £

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Date

Please make cheques payable to Alzheimer’s Society.

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How to interpret and react

During a violent storm a man with dementia was waiting to be collected by his wife from a day centre. He became increasingly agitated, pacing the room and discussing the weather conditions, apparently with himself. Attempts to reassure and distract him made the situation worse, and he began to shout angrily. When his wife arrived, she explained that he had been a pilot during the war. To the ex-pilot the bad weather was jeopardising the safety of his crew.

Once again, if we attempt to step into the man’s shoes and interpret his world from where he stands, his behaviour is both understandable and reasonable.

Support systems

Anyone coping with dementia will need support. Friends, family, the GP and social services all offer valuable help. The Alzheimer’s Society has branches across the country, many of which organise local services and support groups for people with dementia and their carers. The Society has a wide range of information, a national helpline and a wealth of experience to offer.

The Alzheimer’s Society is a membership organisation. The more members we have, the louder our voice will be heard. All members receive a monthly newsletter. You are under no obligation to participate in any of the Society’s activities and it needn’t cost you anything. Any donation you wish to make is entirely at your discretion.
Are you looking after someone who has dementia?

A guide for carers

Alzheimer's Society
Dementia care and research
Giving support

Supporting someone who has dementia can be both frustrating and rewarding. This leaflet provides some ideas for coping with the highs and lows after a diagnosis has been made.

Alzheimer's disease, the most common form of dementia, is a physical illness which causes structural and chemical changes in the brain. Symptoms will get worse over time. The person will gradually realise that their brain no longer functions as it once did and they will probably respond with a range of complex emotions. Carers, too, will probably go through a wide range of emotions during the course of the person's illness.

Only someone who has dementia can really know what it is like. But carers are in a unique position to interpret and understand the person they are looking after. A person with dementia may still experience a full range of emotions. They have a history, a present and a future defining their individuality. An ability to step into the shoes of a person with dementia, to see the world from their perspective and imagine their fears and frustrations, will help you take a positive approach in the difficult times.
How to respond?

What do you do when a person asks the same question over and over again? How do you react when they hold a conversation with someone who isn’t there? Or fail to remember something that has just happened to them?

These are just a few examples of situations that carers face every day.

Everyone living with dementia finds it hard to cope at times. Adapting to the physical, mental and emotional changes can be very difficult both for the person and their carer. However, there can sometimes be unexpected rewards. Iris Murdoch’s husband, John Bayley, spoke movingly of an increased tenderness and closeness in the relationship he developed with his wife as her illness progressed.

Here are a number of practical suggestions which may help ease tension and maintain a sense of perspective.

- **Coping with the unusual**

  A woman with dementia developed a sudden aversion to her bed and refused to sleep in it. The carer was puzzled and irritated by this behaviour until she realised that the problem lay in the fresh bedding. When the familiar covers were removed for washing and replaced with clean, unfamiliar ones, the person became convinced that the bed belonged to someone else. From her point of view, refusing to sleep in a stranger’s bed was entirely reasonable.
Seeing the scene from a different perspective

Change of any kind can cause confusion and be upsetting. In this situation, once the reason for the behaviour is understood, it is simple to provide the remedy – wash and replace the familiar bedclothes before the bed is used again.

Familiarity in the external world can provide an essential sense of security to a person whose internal world is constantly changing.

Would you like to join the Alzheimer's Society?

The Alzheimer's Society is a membership organisation. The more members we have, the louder our voice will be heard – and the easier it will be to get things done. You are under no obligation if you join and it needn't cost you anything. Any donation you wish to make to our work is entirely at your discretion.

Please tick the boxes as required:

☐ Yes, I would like to join the Society

☐ Please send me a free publications catalogue

☐ I am caring for a person with dementia. Please send me the name and telephone number of a local contact. My nearest town is: