

# Decoding the Stages of Dementia

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When first diagnosed, many people might hear the words 'mild', 'moderate', or 'severe' accompany a diagnosis of dementia. We want to know as much as possible about what to expect as far as symptoms, progression, or timeline, and these labels try to provide that understanding and clarity. Unfortunately, I often see clients disappointed and frustrated when this label really doesn't help them understand how to be a better caregiver/care partner to their loved one. Another challenge with these vague stages of dementia is that when they are discussed, it's often in reference to what a person is losing, for example: "During the mild stage of dementia, a person may have difficulty with driving or managing finances correctly." Different medical assessments try to offer understanding but often just give families a number, instead of practical hands-on information.

Several years ago, I came across something called the "GEMS Model" created by dementia expert and innovator Teepa Snow. Teepa recognized the challenges in labeling dementia 'mild', 'moderate', and 'severe', and how this model limited families understanding of how to help the person living with dementia thrive. Through her GEMS Model, Teepa offers families understanding of what to expect in a progressive dementia and alternatively how to best support someone who is functioning at that current level and how to highlight what they CAN do, rather than what they CAN'T do.

Teepa recently came out with a free app for Android (with one for iPhone coming soon!) that describes all of the different stages in her GEMS Model, what changes/symptoms you might notice, and practical strategies to help support someone and respect their dignity. You can also see the GEMS Model at [www.teepasnow.com](http://www.teepasnow.com).

The app is called "Dementia Stages Ability Model" and can be found in the Google Play store. It's a great free resource to understanding a little more about dementia and how to be the best caregiver/care partner possible!

*Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at [www.effinghamalz.org](http://www.effinghamalz.org). If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.*