

The ABC's of Alzheimer's

Helping your children understand the ins and outs of the disease

Alzheimer's disease and related dementia can be difficult for adults to understand, let alone a child. Your child may be noticing changes with their loved one, if they have been experiencing dementia symptoms that have begun interfering with daily life. Only ten years old when my own grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, I remember not understanding what the disease was and how it would affect our lives. From my personal experience as well as my work with other families as a geriatric social worker, I've compiled a couple of things to keep in mind when having these challenging conversations with your children.

-Acknowledge the changes, and give them information

Alzheimer's is a very complex disease, and even now, we still do not know what causes, prevents, or stops it. It may be challenging for your child to understand the ins and outs of the disease, but they will be able to connect symptoms of the disease and how they see them affect their loved one a little easier. Depending on their interests and age, they might also enjoy a worksheet identifying symptoms and disease education. The Alzheimer's Association website has helpful worksheets to give your child or teenager to help guide them through the changes they are seeing.

-Be there to offer support and answer questions

Alzheimer's is a disease that can last on average twelve to thirteen years. This means that you and your child are grieving the loss of your loved one over a number of years, slowly and painfully. Allowing your child the opportunities for counseling, in-person and online support groups, or to be a part of an Alzheimer's disease community event can help give them the support they need. Being able to discuss how the disease has affected them or joining a group of people who have been touched by Alzheimer's can help your child feel that they are not alone.

-Cherish opportunities for meaningful moments

Your child may find it challenging to interact or visit with their loved ones the way that they used to enjoy. Helping them find and create meaningful moments can be the best gift you can give your child. Focusing visits or moments on modified activities/tasks can be helpful for children and their loved ones to enjoy. For example, the total process of making sugar cookies includes purchasing baking items, making sugar cookie dough, cutting out designs, and icing cookies. This entire process may be too much for a person living with Alzheimer's to enjoy and complete successfully. Modifying an activity for the level of your loved one's impairment can be helpful in activities like making sugar cookies. Instead of completing the whole process, a child and their loved one could just ice the sugar cookies together as a fun afternoon.

For more ideas or age-appropriate literature to help guide your conversations with children, please visit the Forget-Me-Not Library at Effingham Public Library.

For more information about Memory Moment articles & Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at 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.