

Children, Teens and Dementia



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Children, Teens and Dementia

- How children and teens may be feeling
- Ways to help them cope
- Communication tips they can use
- How to involve them with the person with dementia
- Youth as caregivers
- Signs that they may be having difficulties coping



Children, teens and dementia

- Children/teens are often aware of others' emotions and tensions.
- It is reassuring for them to understand what the problem is.
- It may be a relief to know that the person's behaviour is part of an illness.
- It might be upsetting to find out later that something has been kept from them.



Children and teens may feel...



Children and teens may feel:

- **Sadness** at what is happening to someone they love.
- **Fear or anxiety** about what will happen to the person in the future.
- **Irritation or boredom** at hearing the same stories over and over again.



Children and teens may feel:

- **Embarrassment** at being seen with the person with dementia.
- **Upset** if the person with dementia gets angry for no reason.
- **Confusion** about "role reversal"



Children and teens may feel:

- **Loss** – the person with dementia doesn't seem to be the same person as before.
- **Anger or rejection** if other family members seem to have less time for them.
- **Hurt** if the person forgets who they are.
- **Guilt** for feeling angry at the person.



What you can do to help



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What you can do to help

- Be as honest as you can in talking about the illness. Use clear, simple explanations.
- Provide age-appropriate information through pamphlets, books, or the internet.
- Encourage your children or teens to do some research with you or on their own.

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What you can do to help

- Lessen fear of the future. Children and teens may be fearful that they or their parents might develop dementia.
- Be patient. You may have to repeat your explanations.
- Answer all questions in a calm and non-judgemental manner.

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What you can do to help

- Keep the lines of communication open. Listen to concerns.
- Be reassuring; offer comfort.
- Try to alleviate guilt.
- Do not saddle them with too much responsibility.

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What you can do to help

- Let children/teens know that their feelings are normal.
- Spend quality time together.
- Allow children/teens to spend time by themselves or with their friends.

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What you can do to help

- Let them know that crying is OK (can be especially difficult for boys)
- Encourage them to practise self-care by doing things they enjoy

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Communication tips to share



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Communication tips

to share with children and teens

- Speak clearly.
- Use a gentle tone of voice.
- Smile. Emphasize facial expressions, body language, and hand gestures.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Approach the person from the front.

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Communication tips

to share with children and teens

- Hug or gently touch the person on the arm to connect.
- Use the person's name to get their attention.
- Tell them your name if they cannot remember.

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Involving children and teens with the person with dementia



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Involving children and teens with the person with dementia

- Spending time with the person and showing them love is the most important thing they can do.
- If appropriate, involve children/teens in assisting with care and/or activities for the person.
 - Be careful not to give them too much responsibility.

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Involving children and teens with the person with dementia

- Try to ensure that the time they spend with the person is enjoyable.
- Make sure that children/teens know that you appreciate their efforts.
- Help them see how their involvement benefits the person.

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Involving children and teens
with the person with dementia

- Take photographs of the children/teens with the person to remind them of the good times.
- Don't leave children/teens in charge of the person, unless you are confident that they are able to cope with any situation.



Activities children and teens can do
with the person with dementia

- Go for a walk.
- Play a simple game or work on a puzzle.
- Make a scrapbook or a "memory box".
- Look at photographs.
- Listen to music together.



Activities children and teens can do
with the person with dementia

- Read stories or the newspaper.
- Cook or bake using a simple recipe.
- Fold laundry, sweep the floor, clip coupons, or do other simple chores.
- Reminisce about the past.



Youth as caregivers



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Youth as caregivers

- A youth caregiver is someone who is helping to care for a family member with dementia, or is responsible for providing primary care.
- The situation
 - There may not be any adult capable of providing all the care.
 - There may not be enough services available in the home for the person with dementia. The youth caregiver steps in to keep the family together.
- Approximately 10% of Canadians youth are caregivers.

(Comox Valley – Youth as Caregivers website,
<http://comoxvalleyyouthascaregivers.org/index.php/youthascaregivers>)

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Youth as caregivers

- Some youth caregivers may become overwhelmed by the task of caregiving.
- Some possible symptoms:
 - Social ▫ Educational
 - Mental ▫ Developmental
- Some possible benefits:
 - Mature ▫ Caring
 - Responsible ▫ Altruistic
- Many youth caregivers value their caregiving experience, but it's not easy.

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Signs that children and teens may be having difficulty coping



Anxiety-related symptoms

Nightmares, sleeping difficulties, attention-seeking or disruptive behaviour, or unexplainable aches and pains.

- The child/teen may need more support. Make sure you give them plenty of time to talk things through.
- If you're worried, you may want to consider talking to their school counsellor, other therapists, or your GP.



School work is deteriorating

Children/teens who are upset often find it harder to concentrate and school work may suffer.

- If this is the case, have a word with your child's teacher so they are aware of the situation.
- Offer extra help with homework.



Appears totally unaffected

If the child/teen seems uncharacteristically disinterested in the situation or unusually cheerful, they may be bottling things up or putting on a brave face.

- Encourage them to talk about the situation and express their feelings.
- Share some of your feelings about what is happening.



Being sad and weepy

Some children/teens respond by feeling very upset and may need a great deal of attention over a long period of time.

- Try to give them some time each day to talk things over.



Retreating from the situation

Older children and teens may withdraw into themselves, spending extra time in their rooms or staying out more than usual.

- They may feel embarrassed talking about their feelings. They need to know that you love them and are willing to listen.
- Show that you are available to talk by spending time together.



To summarize



To summarize

- Children/teens are aware of others' emotions and tensions, even when they don't know the cause. It is reassuring for them to understand what the situation is.
- Be honest and explain the illness to them in terms they can understand.



To summarize

- Be patient, have several conversations and be available to answers their questions.
- Be reassuring.
- Alleviate guilt if it is an issue.



To summarize

- Share ways they can communicate and spend time with the person with dementia.
- Be aware of signs suggesting that they are having problems coping.
- Spend time with them and be open to talk about their concerns and feelings.



Programs & Services

- **Alzheimer Resource Centres**
for information, education, support and referrals.
- **Dementia Helpline**
1-800-936-6033
604-681-8651 (Lower Mainland)
Monday to Friday
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
supportline@alzheimercbc.org
- **Education**
 - Healthy Brain
 - Getting to Know Dementia
 - Shaping the Journey
 - Family Caregiver Series
 - Additional Workshops
 - Tele-Workshops
- **Support Groups**
 - for people with early symptoms
 - for caregivers



Newsletter & Bulletins



Contact and eContact

Provide general information about brain health, upcoming events, and other news.



In Touch

Educational bulletin for caregivers



Insight

Educational bulletin for and by people with dementia

To subscribe, visit:

www.alzheimercbc.org/News-and-Events/Newsletters.aspx

Or call 604-681-6530 or 1-800-667-3742 (toll free)





Provincial Office (to order handouts/bulletins)
1-800-667-3742 or 604-681-6530

Website
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