

# CAREGIVER NEWSLETTER

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## HELPING CHILDREN AND TEENS UNDERSTAND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND OTHER DEMENTIAS

Dementia is not a normal part of aging, and, for families going through the process of the disease, it becomes a challenging ordeal that affects the lives of all the individuals involved. It is important that family members take the time to explain and use this as a learning experience for children so they are informed and can understand what is happening. The impact it has on the child or teen depends on how they are related to the loved one, how close their relationship is with them, and whether they live with them or their loved one lives in a residential care facility, out of state, etc.

### Children and Teens May Feel:

- Sad about changes in a loved one's personality and behavior
- Curious about how people get the disease
- Confused or afraid about why the person doesn't recognize them or acts differently
- Angry or frustrated by the need to repeat activities or questions
- Guilty for getting angry or being short tempered with the person
- Worried that the disease is contagious and that they might get it
- Worried that their parents might develop the disease
- Afraid or embarrassed of the different ways a person may act strangely in front of friends or visitors
- Jealous and resentful of the increased amount of time and attention that is given to the individual
- Unsure how to act around the person

### How Children and Teens May Respond:

- Withdraw from or lose patience with the person
- Perform poorly in school
- Spend more time away from home
- Argue more with others at home
- Have more tantrums/attention seeking outbursts or behaviors
- Verbalize vague physical complaints
- Be more nervous or jumpy

*"You have to love a nation that celebrates its independence every July 4th, not with a parade of guns, tanks, and soldiers who file by the White House in a show of strength and muscle, but with family picnics where kids throw Frisbees, the potato salad gets icky, and the flies die from happiness. You may think you have overeaten, but it is patriotism."*  
– Erma Bombeck



### In This Issue

- Recognizing feelings in children and teens
- Possible responses they may have
- Helpful Suggestions and booklist

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All of these feelings are normal and your child or teenager may or may not discuss or express them to you. Keeping a journal is a great outlet for them to express their feelings and thoughts. Also, keep in mind that children and teenagers are resilient and may respond to their loved one with few problems.



### Ways to Help Children and Teens cope:

- Offer comfort and support
- Let them know their feelings are normal
- Create opportunities for your child to express their feelings such as setting a regular time to be together with them
- Educate them about the disease and symptoms
- Encourage them to ask questions
- Use simple words not medical terminology
- Respond honestly to questions
- Keep lines of communication open
- Reassure them that just because their loved one has Alzheimer's or another dementia, that doesn't necessarily mean that he or she or other family members will also get the disease
- Great progress has been made in scientific research. Let your child know that better treatments and even a cure could be discovered by the time he or she is grown
- Prepare your child or teen for changes as the disease progresses
- Assure them it is not their fault-children can misinterpret behaviors or things said by their loved one with Dementia or they misperceive your symptoms of caregiver role strain [feeling tired, frustrated, sad or short-tempered-all normal feelings that caregivers experience]
- Your local Alzheimer's Association chapter may have support groups for teens

[Sources and for more information: [www.alzgia.org](http://www.alzgia.org), Alzheimer's Association 24/7 HELPLINE (800) 272-3900, Alzheimer's Association Parent's Guide-Helping children and teens understand Alzheimer's Disease]

There are many books on this subject [via Amazon.com search]. Here are just a few that were listed:

[\*Singing with Mamma Lou\*](#) by Linda Jacobs Altman

[\*No Sad Songs\*](#) by Frank Morelli

[\*What's happening to Grandpa\*](#) by Maria Shriver

[\*Grandma and Me: A Kid's Guide for Alzheimer's and Dementia\*](#) by Beatrice Tauber Prior, Psy.D. and Mary Ann Drummond, RN

[\*Does Grandpa Have Alzheimer's Disease?\*](#) by Paulette Hansen

[\*Weeds in Nana's Garden: A heartfelt story of love that helps explain Alzheimer's Disease and other Dementias\*](#) by Kathryn Harrison

[\*Always My Grandpa: A Story for Children about Alzheimer's Disease\*](#) by Scacco, Linda, Ph.D. and Nicole E. Wong