

RESPECTING THE PERSON WITH DEMENTIA

Alzheimer's disease and other dementias affect a person's abilities, mood and behaviour. As the disease progresses, it can become easy to lose sight of the person's abilities among the accumulation of losses. It is important to remember that the responses of the caregiver can affect the person's sense of identity and self-worth. Care providers need to be aware of their attitudes, look for ways to reassure the person and maximize the person's quality of life.

THE PRESENT

Each person with dementia is an individual who has great value that merits respect. The person will experience dementia in their own unique way. As changes in abilities take place, care providers can assist the person by recognizing and supporting strengths, abilities and preferences.

Ways to assist the person:

- Remembering all people need to belong, give and receive affection, and participate in the world around them.
- Allowing the individual to express him or herself, talk about feelings, but respecting the choice not to.
- Encouraging the individual to do the things they are able to do; assisting as necessary by modifying tasks or the environment when they are having difficulty.
- Helping the individual to build and maintain a support network by arranging outings with friends and family or encouraging them to join a support group.
- Helping the individual to stay as active as possible. Exercise programs and volunteer work are valuable early in the disease. Later, volunteer visiting programs, home activity programs and adult day programs can be helpful.
- Understanding that your time and patience will go a long way to help maintain the person's self-esteem.
- Understanding that later in the illness your presence can help comfort the person even if it appears he or she does not know you are there.

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THE FUTURE

To show respect for the person's future, ensure that the individual has full participation in preparing legal and financial plans and making choices that will affect their life.

Ways to assist the person:

- Encouraging the individual to express their wishes and make decisions about a power of attorney, health care directives (including a proxy) and future living arrangements.
- Discussing future living arrangements, housing options and helping to organize and prepare for transitions.
- Helping the individual prepare and create schedules and maintain routines. This will help to maintain the person's independence.
- Assisting the person to document and prepare detailed information about their likes, dislikes, things that give them comfort and ways of coping.

For more information, review the *Alzheimer Societies Ethical Guidelines on: Quality of Life, Decision-Making: Respecting Individual Choice and Driving*.

RESPECTING THE PAST

Memory loss inevitably becomes greater as the disease progresses. Long term memory will remain the longest. Reminiscing about things of the past is a valuable way to build self esteem in the person.

Ways to assist the person:

- Respecting and reflecting on the individual's past accomplishments, significant events and interests.
- Helping the person prepare a life album or story. This can also serve to help future caregivers to better meet the person's needs.
- Noting and respecting past ways of living, worshipping, coping and behaving. Recognizing the intrinsic need in the individual to continue these rituals.

The Alzheimer Society of Manitoba's mission is to alleviate the individual, family and social consequences of Alzheimer's disease and related disorders while supporting the search for a cure.