

Validation and Redirection by Brenda Dapkus

As difficult as is to believe, much less accept, your loved one has Alzheimer's. Between the diagnosis and the end of the battle, will be endless puzzles, challenges, heartaches and decisions. I have worked with numerous Alzheimer patients, and my heart aches for you. That's why I want to share some vital information with you. I know you want to give the best care possible, and I also know that you will not be able to resist correcting your loved one when they say something that seems out of touch with your reality.

Resist it. Little by little, your loved one's memories will be eroded. Literally, the last memory in will be the first memory out; once that memory is gone, it's as if it never happened. To be brutally honest, trying to correct a statement that isn't a part of your reality is cruel and chips away at their dignity.

So what can you do? Read on for some examples and solutions.

Here is a very common example: Mom says, "I must get dinner ready because your dad will be home from work soon." Since your dad has been deceased for a number of years, you instinctively remind your mom that dad is dead.

Let me pause here and say that response is normal because we mistakenly believe that if we correct mom's misconception, then she will snap back to reality.

That's our misconception no matter how good our intentions are. Without realizing it, you have potentially done the following harm:

At the least, you have embarrassed her.

If her memory of his death is gone, then it's as if she is hearing this news for the first time. Imagine your devastation, if you received the news that your mother died. Each time you tell her that dad is dead then you are putting her through the same emotions you would be feeling if you received the news for the first time.

One of the most important things you can do is to preserve her dignity. Her memory has regressed to a time when her husband was alive. It's her truth. Since she has no memory of her husband's death, it's as if you are not telling the truth, even though it's your truth.

Okay, so what do you do? First you acknowledge (validate) her feelings. You might say, "Yes, mom, it is getting close to supper time, and we need to be thinking about dinner." Then you redirect her attention. "Don't worry about dinner, mom, we are going out to dinner as soon as dad gets home. Why don't you go freshen up? Do you still have that nice mauve lipstick? By the way, where did you

get that lipstick – I would like to get some for myself. Do you think that shade would look okay on me, or should I wear red lipstick?”

See where I’m going with this? You are being where she is, and you have preserved her dignity while distracting her from her worry. You might even say that dad has to work late and is going to grab something at the diner. Whatever you say to ease her concern or agitation has done no harm, and in fact, has kept her from being traumatized. Chances are, she won’t even mention it again.....at least that day. Most importantly, you stepped out of your truth - your reality - and became a part of hers. Please never try to reason with someone who has lost the ability to do so.

If your loved one insists on running to the store for groceries, please don’t remind her that she can’t drive anymore. In her world, she is perfectly capable of driving. Either tell her the car is being serviced, or tell her that the car has a mechanical problem that will be fixed tomorrow. If worse comes to worse, there is **a device that you can use to temporarily disable the car**, in case she tries to drive it. Go ahead and let her "drive" to the store. It won't start, you can tell her you'll see about getting it repaired, and the crisis will pass. (See the link to the Alzheimer’s Store)

Because our brains are fully functional, it is hard for us to comprehend just how confusing and unstable life is for one with Alzheimer’s. We need to be a safe haven for our loved ones; they need to feel secure in our care and retain their dignity. You can make that happen.

Remember that they are in a different time and place; if not now, it’s a fact that they will be soon. Be where they are, validate and re-direct, and you will preserve your loved one’s dignity. God bless you, each and every caregiver, for everything you do, and for all that you go through to keep your loved one at home. It’s often a thankless job, and nobody can truly understand what it’s like unless they go through it themselves.

From: http://www.alzheimersfamilyhelp.com/alzheimers_articles/validation-redirectation-alzheimers-support.html

About the author:

Brenda Dapkus, is a Certified Activity Director for seniors and co-founder of Alzheimer's Family Help. She became interested in Alzheimer's Disease in 2003 when she first encountered a resident with AD at the facility where she worked. Because she wanted to understand the progression of the disease, Brenda participated in several Alzheimer's educational courses and became certified to "Train the Trainer" in teaching about this disease. Her many certifications and her experience in activities at an Alzheimer's Specialty Facility has enabled Brenda to not only understand the behaviors common to Alzheimer's Disease, but to discover the events and environmental factors that trigger the behaviors. Brenda believes that when families fully understand the behaviors and learn how to become proactive, their job as caregivers will be less stressful and the dignity of their loved ones will be preserved. It is her goal to work with the families and their loved ones as they battle this insidious disease.

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