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Agree and redirect: guiding seniors out of confusion or frustrating, repetitive talk

Seniors with memory loss often become upset, confused or repeat themselves. It's pointless and even destructive to try to explain "reality" or argue with a senior who's caught up in such a pattern. However, using some very simple techniques, you can limit frustration (theirs and yours) and distract them from the confusion they feel in the present moment.

A helpful blast from the past

Many seniors remember events of the past much better than something that happened just a few minutes ago. By asking questions about their past, you can use this to your advantage to distract seniors who repeatedly insist on "going home" (when they are already home) or "catching the train" to go into work (when they haven't worked for decades) or when they are upsetting themselves in a repetitive worry or destructive thought pattern.

One caregiver said, "When my companion is upset or confused, I ask her questions about her past. 'Did you ever play any sports?' Then she tells me a whole story about a big game she played on her

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How playing games with seniors can help them postpone dementia

Every time seniors play a game of cards or Scrabble® or even play certain computer games, they're stimulating their brains and staving off the onset of dementia or even Alzheimer's disease. This conclusion comes from long-time and recent studies that found that seniors who engage in mentally demanding leisure activities lowered their risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and other dementia by as much as 75 percent.



Home Care Assistance caregivers know that game playing with seniors is good fun and good for them.

Sometimes a game isn't only a game

Researchers found that playing chess, checkers, backgammon or cards was associated with a reduced risk of dementia. Playing a musical instrument and reading had similar effects. Solving frequent crossword puzzles helped too, but to a lesser degree. Curiously, most physical activities, like group exercise or team games, did not show much of a positive effect on reducing dementia in this study. The only exception was ballroom dancing. Researchers think this benefit comes from

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Agree and redirect (continued):

college basketball team. Or I ask her about the pets she had growing up and she can name them and describe them to a T.” This technique helps by getting the senior to remember and focus on the good times, when he or she was healthier and happier. Plus, most people enjoy talking about themselves and their past.

Adapt, redirect and overcome

Another caregiver served a senior who kept repeating that he wanted to go home. She knew it was hopeless to “explain” to him that they already were home. Instead, what worked was to take him for a walk outside, to the corner and back. His short term memory was so poor, he did not remember that he had already been home all day and was satisfied to have “come home.”

One woman’s husband used to wake up in the middle of the night insisting they needed to fly San Francisco right away. Rather than trying to argue with him and explain all the logical reasons why they shouldn’t do that, she instead said, “All right, but we’ll have to get dressed first.” A few minutes into the process, she suggested they eat some ice cream, watch TV and then go to bed. He agreed, thanks to his short term memory, allowing her to redirect him.

Other ways to short-circuit confusion

Here are several other tips gained from numerous case studies and caregiver experiences in preventing or limiting a senior’s feelings of confusion.

- Keep your sentences short and use simple words. Keep one thought per sentence, too. Don’t ask more than one question at a time.
- Give repeated verbal reminders, including the day and time and where they are. Reintroduce yourself and others to the forgetful senior.
- Prevent the senior from being affected or distracted by impairments to sight, hearing or

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Games (continued):

the mental demands of remembering dance steps, moving to music and coordinating with a partner.

Brains. Seniors use them or lose them.

Seniors need to exercise their brains on a regular basis as they grow older. They should set aside one hour each day for this area of exercise.

Activities that keep a person actively searching for words (such as Scramble® and Scrabble®) are especially helpful for improving word recognition, retaining vocabulary and reducing memory loss. Seniors who engaged in cognitive exercises by playing board games or doing Sudoku puzzles were much less likely to develop dementia than those who did not.

Taking the high tech approach

Electronic games and even computer-based, cognitive training programs can actually reverse cognitive impairment in many seniors. One such game is Simon®, the electronic game that became a pop culture icon in the 1980s and is still selling wildly today. To win, the player must repeat the pattern of lights and sounds made by the computer by pressing the buttons in the same sequence. The longer it’s played the faster the game goes.

Computers are becoming more popular with the elderly. As of 2008, more than 23% of older adults in North America aged 65 and older play computer games. Seniors who do play computer games tend to play them more frequently than younger adults. Over one-third of gamers 65 and older say they play games everyday or almost everyday.

The best computer games for seniors are ones that require them to use their memory, calculation and decision making skills, instead of simply shoot-em-up games or simulators. Playing games not only provides entertainment and quality companionship. It also helps prolong seniors’ sharpness of mind and quality of life.

Caregiver Spotlight

Angel Shade, CMA – Fort Worth, TX

This month's spotlight shines from above upon Evangeline Shade. Mrs. Shade must have known that her daughter would grow up to be someone special when she named her and started calling her *Angel*. Angel has been just that and more to several seniors in the greater Fort Worth area. Most recently, Angel arrived at the home of her "buddy," Mr. P, one morning and knew immediately that something was not right.

Angel called 9-1-1 for help. She then contacted the Fort Worth Home Care Assistance office to give an update—meanwhile answering the EMT's questions. Then she notified the family that she was going with Mr. P in the ambulance to the hospital (mostly because he would not let go of her hand). In the ER, his condition became worse and Mr. P was placed on a ventilator and taken to the ICU. All this time, Angel was by his side and answered all of the staff's questions until family arrived. She also went to sit with Mr. P every day until he was discharged from the hospital.

Turned out that Mr. P had pneumonia because something he swallowed went into his lungs. The doctors and nurses all told Angel that if she had not recognized his condition as quickly as she did and called for help, Mr. P would not be alive today. Mr. P's daughter's both agree with the staff and wonder how this entire experience would have been without Angel's help.



Caregiver of the Month. Angel Shade.

“Over the last seven months, Angel has worked with our family, going through the ups and downs of the stresses of having elderly family member who is no longer able to care for himself. Somehow, Angel has become more than a paid employee. She has become a trusted member of our father's care-giving team by showing him compassion, friendship, and a true

commitment to her job, along with a willingness to learn the ins and outs of the unique boundaries involved in such an intimate relationship with a family. While on the surface, this petite young woman may not appear to have the fortitude to handle those situations which we most dread, she digs deeply and finds the strength and wherewithal to manage even the most frightening of emergencies. For this, we are ever grateful,” said Mary and Lucy, Mr. P's daughters.

While Angel works almost daily with Mr. P and has become very close to him, she treats all of her clients the same.

“I just love caregiving,” said Angel, “And working with the elderly has been such a great experience for me. I learn so much from them, and love being able to help them in any way possible.”

Angel received her certificate as a medical assistant in 2004 and worked as a private-duty caregiver for the last 2 years. She has been with Home Care Assistance of Dallas/Fort Worth since July 2008.

Agree and redirect (continued):

their physical conditions by making sure he or she is wearing any necessary glasses, hearing aid, dentures or other prescribed aids.

- Make sure there is ample light, so the senior can see you. Also control sources of excess noise, so the senior can hear you.
- Keep room temperature within the comfort zone of 68°F to 73°F (21°C - 24°C).
- Surround the senior with objects and memorabilia that are familiar to him or her.
- Remove unnecessary, unfamiliar or unsafe clutter from the senior's surroundings.
- Encourage regular calls and visits from familiar friends and relatives.
- Include seniors with dementia in discussions and decision making whenever possible as it helps them feel they have more control. However, avoid using slang, technical terms or medical jargon around a person with dementia as it can lead to confusion and feelings of paranoia.
- If using a caregiver, choose one who can serve the senior long-term to assure familiarity and consistency of care.

Senior care news

Older Women Who Drink Three Cups of Coffee Daily Protect Memory

Caffeine appears to reduce cognitive decline, but not in men or persons below the age of 65.

A new study published in *Neurology*, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology, found that women age 65 and older who drank more than three cups of coffee (or the equivalent in tea) per day had less decline over time on tests of memory than women who drank one cup or less of coffee or tea per day. Even better news is the finding that this power increases with age. The older the women, the less the memory loss. The bad news is the study found it does not work for men. The study also found that caffeine appears to protect seniors from heart disease and death.

Tax deductions for long-term care insurance

If you're paying for long-term care insurance, you could be saving money on your taxes, too. **Consult a tax advisor to see if you qualify** for the growing number of state tax codes that now offer tax incentives to encourage citizens to purchase long-term care insurance. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) also provided tax breaks for qualified long-term care insurance (LTCi) contracts.

Tax deductible limits increase with the age of the person insured. If you itemize your tax deductions, a portion of qualified LTCi premiums may be considered medical expenses, which are deductible after they exceed 7.5% of an individual's Adjusted Gross Income. That portion of the LTCi premium that is eligible as a medical expense rises with the age of the insured individual, as defined by Internal Revenue Code 213(d). That portion of the LTCi premium that exceeds the eligible LTCi premium is not included as a medical expense.

You can treat premiums paid for tax-qualified long-term care insurance for yourself, your spouse or any tax dependents (such as parents) as a personal medical expense. Some LTCi policies allow two people to share one pool of benefits. This may be used to maximize the eligible tax deductibility when there is a difference in ages between the spouses.

You may also qualify for greater tax savings from your tax-qualified LTCi premiums if you are self-employed, a Subchapter C corporation purchasing LTCi on behalf of your employees or pay LTCi premiums through a Health Savings Account.

For more information about long-term care insurance tax-deductibility rules, visit the American Association for Long-Term Care Insurance web site at <http://www.aaltci.org>.