

Basic Principles for understanding and caring for a person with Alzheimer's disease

1. Treat the person with respect and dignity

- a) Do not treat the person as if he/she is not there.
- b) Do not joke about inappropriate speech or behaviour. Humour can be very good if used at an appropriate time.

2. Simplify tasks

- a) Break down each task and activity into easy steps.
- b) Limit choices.
- c) Allow time for slower processing of messages.
- d) Reassure the person with each step e.g. "You are doing great."

3. Maintain a calm, soothing environment

- a) Soft sounds and voices are best. Music can be comforting.
- b) Give a reassuring touch when appropriate.
- c) Avoid surprises or abrupt movements.
- d) Keep the environment as consistent as possible. Even slight changes can be upsetting.

4. Know what to do if the person becomes agitated

- a) Try to figure out the source of the upset. Does he/she need to use the bathroom? Is he/she ill or in pain?
- b) Change the subject if it appears to bother the person.
- c) Distract and try to involve them in a different activity.

5. Respect the patient's view of reality

- a) Reality orientation (except sometimes for time and place) is not effective with those who suffer with severe memory loss.
- b) Remember that their reality is different from yours. Whenever possible, just go along with the person and "be in their world". Don't argue as it will not be productive.

6. Remember that patience is essential

- a) Alzheimer's disease allows little or no control over strange verbal, physical or sexual behaviour.
- b) The person often cannot remember enough about their past reasoning or behaviour patterns to always respond appropriately.
- c) Understand that what can seem like manipulative behaviour. It's just the disease.