

# Positive Approaches for Loved Ones with Dementia



Kansas Advocates for Better Care

# Developing day-to-day routines for loved ones with Dementia

Keep a sense of structure and familiarity.

Having consistency in routine can help orient the person, for things like waking up, mealtimes, bathing, dressing, visits with friends, and bedtime.

Use cues that help orient to time of day.

Open curtains to morning sun, in the evenings close the curtains. Use relaxing smells or play soft music to calm the person and ready them for rest.

Be flexible. Respond to what the person is ready to do.

Let the person know what's next even if you are not sure that s/he completely understands.

Each day, involve the person in activities as much as they are able.

Make sure the environment is physically and emotionally safe for the needs of the person.

# Communication

Call the person by name.

Use techniques to attract and maintain the person's attention. Smile, make eye contact, use gestures, and touch.

Remind the person who you are.

Speak slowly.

Keep communication short, simple, and clear. Use simple statements and few words at a time.

Give one direction or ask one question at a time.

Use closed-ended questions which can be answered "yes" or "no."

Limit the number of choices you offer to two at a time.

Repeat back what the elder is saying to you as often as necessary.

Use visuals to help with communication as speech functions decrease – pictures, smart phone, & tablet apps

# Care Plan

Having a plan for health care and assistance is very helpful and essential if more than one person is caregiving. It is also important if a loved-one is in an adult care facility.

Set up monthly meetings to check in with healthcare providers, nurses, doctors and pharmacist. Consult on health care, treatment and current medications.

Be proactive in asking health care providers for meetings to address care plans for health or behavioral issues and to assess success or failure of new interventions.

When assessing an intervention, meet to review within a week. Get input from the person, caregivers, and health providers in deciding to continue, quit, or change course.

DO NOT accept a new medication without first understanding possible benefits or dangers. Consult with physicians and pharmacist.

For more on care planning see [www.kabc.org](http://www.kabc.org)

# Positive Approaches

All activities ought to be at the level of an elder's pleasure, ability, and tolerance.

Position things around the elder which are familiar and to which s/he responds positively.

Listen attentively to what the individual with dementia is saying - both verbally and non-verbally. Use one-step instructions and reassuring tones.

Use activities to stimulate different senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Use activities that promote a positive response from the person.

Keep in mind the limits of the person's focus and attention, it may be only a few minutes.

Think ahead. Plan for situations that could result in problem behaviors.

**To better understand Positive Approaches please watch:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fyZQf0p73QM>

Or visit: [musicandmemory.org](http://musicandmemory.org)

# Positive Approaches

Be patient and kind. Redirect the person's attention as helpful. Do not argue or try to convince a person with dementia, it will result in frustration for everyone.

Promote a sense of security and comfort.

Use positive reinforcements, such as smiles, a gentle touch, personal attention and praise.

Allow the individual to have some sense of control. Being able to make choices is still important to someone who is very confused.

Being calm when an individual is aggressive or agitated can defuse a tense situation and help reduce a person's fears.

Assess the situation to protect yourself. Should an individual's aggression become violent, be mindful of your own safety first.

Caregivers should practice ways to reduce their own stress. Your anger and frustration could aggravate a behavior problem.

# Positive Activities

Massages of the hands, arms or feet can reduce anxiety and agitation.

Engage in art therapy, any kind of art - painting, sketching, coloring, craft projects at the level of the person's interest and ability.

Singing, reading, spending time with children or friends if it brings joy & laughter.

Exercise/Movement for health and function; walking, chair yoga, balloon toss.

Pets can bring calmness and much needed companionship, if a person likes animals.

Time outdoors can be very restorative. Go for a drive, visit a park, or take a short walk. Or just sit outdoors and enjoy nature.

Listen to familiar music, play an instrument, or sing along to karaoke.

# Things to Avoid

Loud sounds - TV, radio or alarms,  
disturbing content or music.

Overstimulation.

Things that trigger stress or anxiety.

Triggers for danger, fear, or tension.

Constant sounds - even sounds  
meant to be soothing.

Crowds.

# What If There Are Problems??

Identify triggers for problem behaviors and eliminate or adjust.

Identify triggers of decline in mental or physical health and treat/change.

Talk with professional health care providers such as physician, nurse, aide, pharmacist, activity aide, therapist, or social worker and facilitate communication between them to enhance positive outcomes for the person with dementia.

Contact Kansas Advocates for Better Care for guidance, support and help and in locating oversight, protection, or assistance resources.

# Medications

**The FDA has not approved any anti-psychotic medication for the treatment of dementia-related psychosis.**

Always discuss the risk of increased mortality with the elder, family, caregivers, doctor & pharmacist.

Caregivers have a heightened responsibility to conduct a risk analysis for the elder. Caregivers must monitor for common and potentially disabling side effects of psychotropic medications.

Quality of life is important for an elder with dementia. However, benefits from the use of antipsychotic drugs are very uncertain. These drugs are widely used to treat psychosis, aggression, and agitation in persons with dementia, but carry significant risks.

Consider the clinical profile of the person and the side-effect profile of the drug.

Side effects to watch for with antipsychotics:

- Blood pressure changes

- Changes in mental status, movement disorders

- Reduced responsiveness

- \*Vital signs must be regularly monitored

# Resources

Contact disease-specific organizations for support, education and guidance.

## **Alzheimer's Association KS Chapters:**

**Prairie Village**

**Topeka**

**Wichita**

Toll-Free: 1.800.272.3900

[www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)

## **American Stroke Foundation Kansas**

5960 Dearborn St, Shawnee Mission, KS 66202

1.913.649.1776

[www.americanstroke.org](http://www.americanstroke.org)

## **Brain Injury Association of Kansas & Greater KC**

6701 W. 64th St., Suite 120

Overland Park, KS 66202

1.913.754.8883

[www.biaks.org](http://www.biaks.org)

## **Kansas AIDS Resources**

1000 SW Jackson, Suite 210

Topeka, KS 66612

1.785.368.6567

[www.kdheks.gov/sti\\_hiv/ryan\\_white\\_care.htm](http://www.kdheks.gov/sti_hiv/ryan_white_care.htm)

## **Parkinson Foundation of the Heartland**

8900 State Line Rd., Suite 320

1.800.4PD.INFO (1.800.473.4636)

[www.parkinsonheartland.org](http://www.parkinsonheartland.org)



*Founded in 1975 as **Kansans for Improvement of Nursing Homes***

In 1975 Kansas Advocates for Better Care (KABC) was founded by Petey Cerf and other concerned citizens disturbed by the deplorable conditions endured by many residents in Kansas nursing homes. They toured nursing homes and presented their findings to Kansas legislators. Thanks to their dedication, many important new laws and regulations were adopted that ensure adequate training for nurses, sanctions against poor performing facilities, and other protections for some of our most vulnerable citizens.

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*“Great opportunities to help others seldom come,  
but small ones surround us every day.” ~ Sally Koch*