



Between Friends

Thoughts on Caregiving

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Behavior Acceptance

Behavior management is a term usually used by medical professionals when discussing ways to handle a dementia patient's (or other person's) odd or otherwise challenging behaviors. Things like pacing, wandering, constant talking, repetitive questions, or slowness in response or action.

Families often seek ways to best "manage" such behaviors at home. Sometimes, medications are prescribed to "manage" – or eliminate – the difficult behavior.

Rather than trying to "manage" a person's behavior, a number of experts stress the need to "accept" such behaviors, particularly in terms of "time travel" and slowness in response.

Many people with dementia are "time travelers." They may not always recognize themselves, their families or their homes. One of the reasons for this occasional or frequent lack of recognition is that the person who may be 75 years old may think of herself as being 40 years old. A spouse, therefore, may be viewed as a father or uncle. Adult children may be seen as brothers or sisters.

Not being recognized by a parent or spouse can be devastating. But arguing, or trying to reason the person into understanding who you are, doesn't usually work.

An Alzheimer's support group participant learned to adapt to and accept his wife's "time travel." She no longer recognized herself in the mirror, but viewed her own image as a kind, older woman who was "always there" for her. She would often talk to the woman in the mirror, or would complain to her husband about "that man."

Rather than acknowledge that he was "that man," the husband would simply let his wife talk about "him," support her in her anger, and assure her that "he" wouldn't bother her anymore.

We live in a fast-paced world, always hurrying to do things and get to places. As caregivers, we can become very frustrated with the person who is slow to respond to our questions, or slow to do what we want or need them to do.

Parkinson's disease, memory loss, hearing loss and depression are just a few of the many conditions that can affect a person's "response time."

We are often unrealistic when we expect an immediate response to our questions or demands. The person with hearing loss, dementia or other condition needs more time to process what she/he hears, and is simply unable to respond quickly. Our impatience with them makes matters worse by adding pressure, which makes them even less able to respond or act.

"Patience is a virtue," and "slow but sure" are two adages that certainly apply. As caregivers, we need to slow down and give our family members or care receivers time to understand what we are asking, as well as time to react. By adjusting to our family member's "time zones" (mentally as well as physically), we can help them to continue making their own choices and doing as much for themselves as they can, for as long as they can.

One last thought – what, exactly, happens to all those minutes we rush through doing things trying to save???

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