



Cottage CONNECTIONS

Summer 2017



Welcome to the inaugural edition of Cottage Connections. Within this and future publications, we will offer family members and caregivers of those living with Alzheimer's disease and related forms of dementia supportive information. Articles providing information on caring for yourself as a caregiver, tips on remaining connected with your loved one as he/she progresses through their journey, and education regarding various topics related to Alzheimer's and dementia will be provided. Should you have any questions related to any of the articles within the publications, please contact the Memory Care Facilitator at your local American Senior Communities' Auguste's Cottage for more information.

— Melanie Perry, MS, CADDCT, Director of Memory Care Support Services

Removing Blame

Sometimes, in the midst of a loved one progressing through an Alzheimer's or related dementia journey, caregivers continue to expect previous levels of functioning and interactions from that person. For instance, a family member might say, "I can't believe that she forgot that I was coming to pick her up. We just discussed it yesterday!" or, "Why would he say he wanted to go to a movie this morning, but now that it's time to leave, he doesn't want to go?!" Of course, such occurrences are due to the changes taking place in the individual's brain thereby causing forgetfulness or mood changes throughout the day in that person.

Fortunately, there is a strategy that may help a caregiver to greatly reduce his or her frustration with a loved one living with a dementia; One needs to make a conscious decision to remove all blame for "inappropriate" actions or expressions on the part of the loved one. If a caregiver can tell one's self, "My loved one is having challenging brain changes and is doing the best that they can do. I will choose to remove all blame for any frustrations that I feel from my loved one and place it soundly on the dementia that is causing these frustrations." By doing so, a caregiver can more easily continue to love his or her family member, support them, and funnel any negative feelings on that "darn dementia" that is causing the change of functioning. Doing so may greatly reduce the annoyance, frustration, or anger that caregivers often feel while accompanying a person through a dementia journey.

Communicating With A Person Living With Dementia

As a loved one progresses through a dementia journey, their communication needs change. Words may become lost, informational processing will take longer, confusion about current time may develop, and other changes will occur that will make verbal interactions ever more challenging. Instead of withdrawing from a loved one who appears to be no longer able to talk with you, please consider the following tips:

- Call your loved one by his/her name to ensure they know that you are trying to communicate.
- If giving instructions, use short, simple, one or two-step directions.
- Give your loved one plenty of time to respond to questions and statements.
- Limit available choices to two for the person to decide from (i.e. the blue dress or the red dress, a brownie or ice cream).
- Avoid open-ended questions such as, “What would you like for dessert?” Such questions can be too abstract and cause frustration for your loved one.
- Don’t ask questions that rely on short-term memory (“Remember, you had breakfast an hour ago?”). Rather, concentrate on long term memories that your loved one can recall confidently and will reminisce about fondly.
- Turn negatives into positives. Say, “Let’s go here” instead of “Don’t go there.”
- Turn questions into statements. Say, “Let’s go eat” instead of “Are you ready for lunch?”
- Focus on feelings and not on facts. Pay attention to your loved one’s body language and facial expressions to determine what is going on. Words can sometimes be inaccurate. Please be aware that it is not unusual for those living with dementia to say the opposite of what they actually mean.
- Validate feelings to help put those feelings into words. “Your face tells me that you’re feeling very frustrated right now. Am I right?”
- Don’t argue if your loved one thinks that someone who has passed is still around, such as a parent. Instead, ask for his/her favorite memory about that person and help your loved one to reminisce.
- If your loved one doesn’t recognize you, try not to despair. Generally, he/she hasn’t forgotten you, rather, he/she is just picturing you as a much younger age. Try to elicit stories from your younger years that you can both enjoy together.

Good communication will help you to maintain your connection with your loved one and to minimize frustration for the both of you.



Cottage Connections Group Provides Education and Support

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia can be a difficult road to navigate. The journey can be riddled with numerous questions as well as emotional challenges. Educating yourself on related topics and seeking support from others in similar circumstances can become essential for a caregiver's well-being and success. For these reasons, our community offers a monthly group meeting, known as our **Cottage Connections**. This group allows individuals a vital opportunity to learn and share their experiences through a blend of practical knowledge and emotional support.

The first component of our **Cottage Connections** is education. Knowledge is crucial in assisting caregivers as they cope with a loved one's dementia journey. The more you know what to expect and the more you understand why your family member might say or do different things, the easier it may be to manage your own emotions and stress level.

The second aspect of our **Cottage Connections** is more supportive in nature. Caregivers and family members have the opportunity to ask questions, share stories and give and receive comfort and advice. Group members

have "been there", and listen compassionately to expressions of guilt, frustration and anxiety.

Stories are shared about common missteps that caregivers may have made or challenging situations that have been faced. This confidential, positive setting for sharing experiences – and releasing emotions – can be a tremendously important factor in how well caregivers cope with stress. Attendees are encouraged to participate in this part of the meeting, or they may depart after the educational portion if they are not comfortable with this more emotional aspect of the meeting.

Being with others in similar situations can be a source of practical help as caregivers learn about new ideas and resources. Most of all, you may find it helpful to talk to or listen to others wrestling with similar problems and the complicated feelings they bring. That is why our residents' family members, as well as members of our community are invited and encouraged to attend.

Please contact the Memory Care Facilitator of your local American Senior Communities' Auguste's Cottage to obtain more information about our monthly **Cottage Connections** family caregiving group.





Exercise and Caregiving

We know that caregiving is a full-time job, particularly for those caring for someone at home. Because of this, it is not uncommon for caregivers' health to suffer in some way. For example, doctors' appointments may be missed if a loved one is having a bad day; meals may become unbalanced due to caring for a loved one who is only interested in eating sweeter things or who becomes "stuck" on one particular food item; meals might be omitted because we are trying so hard to get nutrition into our loved one that we forget to feed ourselves; etc.

Along with all of these challenges, another aspect of healthy living that is often one of the first to fall by the wayside is exercise. With 24-hour care responsibilities, how can a caregiver expect to find even 20-30 minutes for personal exercise? Try this:

- **Look for opportunities to exercise with your loved one.** A 20-30 minute walk during the day can help you both feel better. Just because the weather has turned hotter doesn't mean that you can't head out a little earlier or later in the day and enjoy a walk on a lovely summer day! Remember to take water with you to ensure proper hydration of yourself and your loved one.
- **Multi-task.** Look for ways to exercise while doing other things. For instance, if you are standing at the sink washing dishes, you can also use that time to do full or partial leg squats to keep your bottom and leg muscles firm. You could also do leg lifts or torso twists while brushing your teeth to work additional muscles.
- **Exercise while your loved one is sleeping.** There are many great exercise DVD's on the market and exercise apps available. Find one that suits your fitness level and work with it while your loved one naps or goes to sleep for the night.
- **Break exercise into smaller increments.** Recent studies show that exercising periodically throughout the day may actually be more effective than exercising for 45-60 minutes at a time. Try 10-15 minutes of exercise two or three times a day and you may see your metabolism begin to creep up!

However you find the time, it is important that you keep exercise in your daily routine. In addition to the positive physical aspects that you will experience, the endorphins that are released during exercise will keep you in a better place emotionally to care for your loved one.



*"Where caring people
make the difference!"*

