Caregiver Toolbox-Dementia Series
Managing Common Challenging Behaviors

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Outline - Common Challenges

- Hallucinations and Delusions
- Wandering
- Bathing/Showering/Cleanliness
- Toileting Challenges
- The Sleep-Wake Cycle
- Eating/Drinking
Hallucinations and Delusions

- Very, very common as the brain deteriorates.
- Completely *REAL* to the person. Can be scary or harmless. Can also be based in something real like shadows or noises that the person misnames.
- *Hallucinations*- seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling things that are not there.
- *Delusions*- Believing that things are happening that are not happening.
Delusions and Hallucinations: Suggestions

- Do NOT argue or try to reason with the person.
- In other words—“Go with the flow of conversation.” “Get on the bus and go where it’s going.”
- Ignore a hallucination that is not causing a problem.
- Offer reassurance if it is scary to them.
- Stay calm—do not show anger or frustration.
- Distract the person and refocus their attention.
- Remember that the person’s behavior is the result of physical changes beyond their control.
- Medications can be helpful—talk to your doctor.
Wandering - Ideas to Consider

- People with all forms of dementia can get lost in places that were previously well known to them.
- This can happen in driving early in the process so it can be important to not have them drive alone or stop driving all together with a dementia diagnosis.
- Later on, it is common for people to think they have something to do so they go outside and then can wander away without realizing where they are going.
Wandering—Suggestions

- If a person has never gotten lost, it is still important to plan for a day when they might wander.
- Make sure the person has some form of ID on them in case they are found wandering.
  - Consider enrolling in the Medic Alert/Safe Return program which gives a bracelet that is hard to remove with information on it. Get one for both you and the person. www.Alz.org
  - Enroll in the State Next of Kin Registry program if they have a drivers license or state ID. www.bmv.ohio.gov
  - If they will wear one, have an emergency response system necklace that they wear and notifies a central line if they fall or get lost.
  - If people carry a phone, put a tracking app on their phone.
Wandering—Suggestions

- Put warning bells on doors, windows and other access points to the outside.
- Find ways to lock doors at night so that people cannot leave without someone knowing.
- Hide keys, coats, suitcases and other visual cues that may cause someone to think they have to leave.
- Notify neighbors and others to your situation so they can be on watch in case they see someone starting to wander.
- Some communities have emergency responders who can be notified if a person is at risk of wandering.
Bathing/Showering/Cleanliness
Why Do These Activities Become Challenging?

- People think they have already bathed/showered that day.
- These are private activities and most people are not comfortable with others assisting or asking questions.
- People don’t smell themselves or notice the soiled clothing they are wearing.
- People don’t want to be cold and they are cold more and more often.
- People become afraid of water especially on their head and face region.
- Movement and mobility become challenging and bathrooms are places where many falls and accidents happen.
Bathing/Showering/Cleanliness Suggestions

- Think about how often people really need to shower/bathe for realistic health and safety concerns—probably not every day.
- Prepare the space: add a shower chair and hand held spray nozzle, warm the towels/washcloths first, have calm music playing.
- If people have a history of hair styling or grooming at a shop, make a weekly appointment at the salon/barber to get a wash, set and/or trim.
Bathing/Showering/Cleanliness Suggestions

- Offer incentives like lunch with a grandchild or some other special treat for after the shower.
- In a pinch, purchase some cleaning products which are no rinse and allow people to get clean and get hair washed.
- Have several sets of similar clothing to exchange/substitute for when people do get undressed to shower or bathe.
Toileting Challenges

- In general, as people age, issues with urinary incontinence and constipation become more common as the body parts also age and become less efficient.
- However, most people who experience dementia will develop extra toileting challenges at some point on the journey.
- The main reason is that since the brain is deteriorating, the body does not feel the urge or read the signs correctly any longer.
Toileting Challenges

- People may also be on medications which can contribute to many types of incontinence and constipation challenges.
- With dementia, people struggle with language so they may not be able to tell you if they are uncomfortable.
- Urinary tract infections are common in dementia and they generally cause greater confusion in people.
Toileting Challenges
Suggestions

- Make sure people are drinking enough fluids and eating fiber during the day. May have to add some products to people’s diets as dementia progresses. Talk to your healthcare provider.

- Remind people about using the bathroom on a regular schedule as often they do not get the reminders any longer. Remember that people are not having accidents on purpose.

- There are many adult incontinence products to assist in keeping accidents from soiling clothing, bedding and furniture. Look for products that resemble regular underwear—resist the urge to call these products diapers...adults are not children and this language is demeaning to them.
The Sleep-Wake Cycle

- People with dementia often struggle with maintaining a healthy sleep/wake cycle.
- Either they sleep during the day and are up at night or they are up and down all night and wondering the house.
- People with dementia often struggle with evenings as well. They tend to be more confused later in the afternoon and evening and have more hallucinations and delusions then. We call this “Sundowners Syndrome.”
- Care partners end up exhausted as they are often up at night with the person and still up during the day.
The Sleep-Wake Cycle
Suggestions

- Get people up and moving during the day as much as possible. People who sit in a chair all day dozing are much more likely to be up at night.

- Talk to your doctor if people are wondering at night or experiencing sleeplessness. There may be some mild medications that can assist. Stay away from using over the counter sleep aids without medical advice.
The Sleep-Wake Cycle Suggestions

- Pay attention to the environment in the evenings: lots of shadows, outside stimulation and noise can be a problem. Calming, familiar music and old movies can be helpful. Generally modern TV is not helpful.
- Prioritize sleep as a care partner....pay attention to your own sleep so you are fresh to provide care.
Eating/Drinking
Common Challenges

- As people’s brains deteriorate with dementia, getting enough food and drink into people can become challenging.
- People forget to eat and drink or think they already have; also they may eat over and over again if the food is a visual cue in front of them.
- People can dislike textures or flavors that are new or different and food often needs more seasoning to taste good to them.
- People can forget how to use silverware or need specially adapted silverware to eat. Eating with hands is common and finger foods can often be successfully offered.
Eating/Drinking Common Challenges

- People crave SWEET AND COLD FOODS and may eat foods in odd combinations.
- People may need nutritional supplements as their diets become more limited in variety.
- As the brain deteriorates, chewing and swallowing can become challenging and people often need softer textured foods or thicker liquids as they run the risk of choking and aspirating.
If Something is NOT Working:

- Slow down and back off! Try it another way.
- Make Sure – you are:
  - Limiting verbal information
  - Sending POSITIVE and FRIENDLY non-verbal cues
  - Taking your time to CONNECT
  - Letting the person know what you want – THINK about ONE step at a time
  - Show them what you want – model it, gesture through it, point to it...
  - Respecting the person’s personal & intimate space
Our Goal for YOU

- Understand of what’s happening with the person with dementia.
- Get Support so you both can survive and thrive together.
- Develop insight so you can have moments of joy with the person.
What Assistance is Available for Family Caregivers?

- A nationally funded program operated by the AAA’s.
- Provides caregiver workshops & resource guides
- Funds services designed to assist caregivers on a short term basis. Services include: information and assistance, counseling, respite, & other supplemental services.
COAAA County Caregiver Partner Agencies

- Delaware---SourcePoint
  740-363-6677
- Fairfield---Meals on Wheels
  740-681-5050
- Fayette---Community Action Commission
  740-335-7282
- Franklin---Franklin County Office on Aging
  614-525-6200
- Licking---Licking County Aging Program
  740-345-0821
- Madison---Madison County Senior Center
  740-852-3001
- Pickaway---Pickaway County Senior Center
  740-474-8831
- Union---Union County Senior Services
  937-644-1010
When a child cannot live with his or her parents.
Questions & Thank You!
www.coaaaa.org
614-645-7250