Blame Everything on Something or Someone Else

If you must take the car keys away... If they accuse you of stealing from them... blame someone else for the wrong they feel is occurring to them. You do not want to take the blame if you are the main person who takes care of them. You want them to like you so you must portray you are only here to help. If you must take care car keys away because they are no longer safe on the road, call the local police and ask them to do it. If you think someone is stealing their things, say you will call the cops and leave the room. Go get a drink of water or walk around for a while. The important part is that they feel they have heard them and you are going to take care of it. If they blame you for putting them in this facility, transfer the blame to the doctor or a person from their past they don’t like, or the bad weather this winter.

If you visit and their bed is wet, confidently say, “That roof is leaking again!” Now they either think they didn’t wet the bed or you’re stupid. Either is a win for them. If you see that their pants are wet, quietly whisper, “You must have sat in some water. I think I know where some pants are to change into.” You could also act like you don’t even notice and then whisper your findings to a staff person on the way out.

You can also avoid confrontation by taking the blame upon yourself and repeating these words over and over again. “I’m sorry. I forgot.” “I’m sorry. It’s my fault.” “I’m sorry. You are right.” How can they be mad at a person who is sorry? Whether you have something to be sorry for or not isn’t the issue. The issue is taking the blame off of them every chance you get, so they have less stress. When they have less stress they function higher. Just like You!

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They Lose Their Short-Term Memory

We know people with Alzheimer’s lose their short-term memory. This is why they repeat their stories, why they cannot remember what they had for breakfast, or that you visited the night before. Instead of making them utilize their short-term memory, focus on their long-term memory. Instead of asking if someone came to visit last night, talk about that person in general. “Your husband is a hard worker. He sure likes to…”

What about that story they tell you over and over again and you want to say, “You already told me that 10 times!” Please refrain and see the positive side to their story. Think to yourself, this is the story I must remember. As the disease progresses and they lose their ability to communicate, this is the story I can tell them over and over again that will put a light in their eye and possible a smile on their face.

Another situation, which happens frequently, is when you remind them over and over again they have an appointment. When you arrive to pick them up, they say, “No one told me. I am not ready to go.” First of all, stop reminding them of upcoming events because they will not remember. Instead, come an hour early and say, “I am here to take you to…” When they say you didn’t tell them, slowly recite these words, “I’m sorry. I forgot to tell you. (pause) We still have lots of time. I will help you get ready.” Comment frequently after that, “we’ll go for ice cream.” Ice cream is a magically persuasive word. They are more likely to cooperate for ice cream.

As the Disease Progresses, Their Age Regresses

As the disease progresses, a person with Alzheimer’s will get younger and younger in their mind. In other words, they lose more and more of their short-term memory. Early in the disease they may have lost the last 10 years, but as the disease progresses they may lose the last 40 years, the last 60 years and so on. This is why they don’t recognize their spouse because in their mind they think they are 25 and their spouse is too old. They may ask where their mom is or want to go to work. If you see them talking to themselves in the mirror, they think they are talking to another person because they don’t recognize themselves. That person in the mirror is much older than they are. If they think the reflection in the mirror is someone else and causing a negative reaction, they you will want to remove any mirrors in their room.

First of all, figure out what age they are living. For instance, if they are looking for their spouse but do not recognize their spouse, you can assume they remember they are married which is usually between the age of 20 to 40. If they are looking for their mom, you can assume they are an adolescent. Once you figure out what age they are living, then you need to think about what was significant in their life at that time. Talking about that time in their life can trigger memories you may not have heard before. This is an opportunity to get to know them in a different way because they don’t recognize you. Use this new information to create moments of joy for both of you.

Jolene Brackey, author of “Creating Moments of Joy”, is an exciting national speaker who shares many warm, practical solutions to ease the daily struggles related to Alzheimer’s and Dementia. For further resources and information you can visit her at www.enhancedmoments.com.
It is true that family heirlooms and keepsakes are irreplaceable. It is also true that "this stuff" triggers for you too!

Stuff isn’t valuable until it brings a smile to someone’s face. Priceless memories a moment of joy by bringing them when you visit and then take them home again.

Excerpt from "Meet them where they are and on pleasant terms." Virginia McCone

It is difficult for people to live their truth, to tell them their mom is doing chores when their mom is really gone, to tell them their horse is in the barn when they no longer have a horse. We don’t like doing this because we feel we are lying to them. I reassure you it is not lying but it is “living their truth.” No matter how hard you try to bring them to our reality you will lose in the end because they will ultimately think you are lying, trying to hurt them, or you are an impostor.

Maybe it will help if you visualize yourself in their position. You have Alzheimer’s but do not remember you do and you think you are perfectly fine. You are actually 85 but think you are 24. You wake up every morning in a strange place. You remember you have children but you cannot find them. You ask a stranger who acts as if they know who you are, “Where are my children?” They tell you the truth… “Your husband isn’t visiting until Tuesday. You live here now. Everything will be fine.” Your reaction would be, “Everything will not be fine because this is not my home. My children need me. I want to go home!” Does this vision help you understand? More importantly I hope it takes away some of the guilt you feel about “lying.”

Bottom line is this… there is no reasoning with a person who has Alzheimer’s and you will not be able to make them live your reality. You can fight until you are blue in the face but you will lose in the end. Live their reality and find treasures in their reality. By enforcing their thought pattern, whatever that may be, you have a better chance of going into a more meaningful conversation.

"Meet them where they are and on pleasant terms." Virginia McCone

It is true that family heirlooms and keepsakes are irreplaceable. It is also true that you should not leave them here because it may get misplaced or hidden. But create a moment of joy by bringing them when you visit and then take them home again.

Stuff isn’t valuable until it brings a smile to someone’s face. Priceless memories “this stuff” triggers for You too!