

**Helping the Dementia Caregiver:
What Family and Friends Can Do to Lighten the Load
By Shannon Nosbisch, CDP, DCS**

Caregiving is one of the most stressful jobs! According to the Alzheimer's Association in 2019, 60% of dementia caregivers report high or very high stress levels with an estimated 40% experiencing clinical depression! It is a demanding, 24/7, stressful job!

Caregivers need help, but often don't like to ask. Ask them what they need specifically, not "let me know if you need anything". Offer suggestions of what you are willing to do. If they do mention something that they need help with, even if it is something you might not want to do, do it.

Even when a caregiver replies "fine" when asked how they are doing, you may have to dig a little deeper to find out how they are really doing. Let them know that you understand that caregiving is hard and offer to listen when they are ready to talk. Caregivers and their families may need time to assess their needs and determine what they need help with. Listening is probably the most important way to help a caregiver, especially without offering judgment or suggestions unless asked to. Caregivers rarely expect to solve their problems, but they need to vent their frustration and sorrow from time to time.

One of the most important things you can do to help a caregiver is to educate yourself about dementia and learn how to communicate with someone living with dementia. In this way, you can demonstrate that you are serious about wanting to help them and have made an effort to learn how. For tips on communication, go to our website at www.effinghamalz.org and find the caregiver tip sheets tab. We have a communication tip sheet there.

When you have educated yourself about the disease and best ways to communicate, you can offer respite for the caregiver while you stay with the care receiver. I would visit with the care receiver while the caregiver is in the house at least once before you stay with them by yourself to make sure you are comfortable with them and the caregiver knows you are capable of staying with them alone. This way, the caregiver can take the time to get a haircut, shop, or maybe just read a book or catch up on sleep.

Keep in touch with the caregiver. You may have to make the most effort in the relationship as their time is taken up with caregiving. Send a card or note to brighten their day or call regularly at a convenient time for them. Surprise them with a treat, such as fresh flowers, gourmet coffee or tea or something else you know they would like. Don't "drop by" unannounced. Plan for visits.

The Alzheimer's Association has a list of 100+ Ways to Support Caregivers by Sharing the Care at <https://hdsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/12048.pdf> . This list has ways family and friends can help with everyday tasks. Subtitles in this list are Errands, Emotional Support, Household Chores/Maintenance, Family Routine, Logistical Support, Pampering and Spiritual Support. Please check this list out and offer help to a caregiver today!!!

Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness (EAAA) is a volunteer-run, not-for-profit organization founded to provide education and support to all families, caregivers, and people with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia in Effingham County and the surrounding area. For more information about Effingham Area

Alzheimer's Awareness, check out the website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nosbisch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.