

## Ways to Redirect Someone with Alzheimer's Disease

Redirection is a handy all-purpose tool for responding to many of the bothersome, inappropriate, or potentially unsafe behaviors of Alzheimer's and dementia patients.

To redirect means to help the person move toward feeling better and acting more constructively- literally, to change the direction of things.

- 1. Start with a calm and confident approach.** Don't be insistent, upset or too direct. A warm smile, eye contact, a light touch and relaxed posture make the listener more open to your suggestions. An arm around the shoulder or a hand outstretched in invitation can be used to "guide" the person.
- 2. Ask questions to learn more.** Try to determine the cause for the behavior. Questions you can ask yourself: Is she bored? Is he upset about something? Is there something about the room or situation that keeps triggering this? Questions you can ask the person: Dad, do you need to use the bathroom? Can I get you something? Are you hungry (or tired, or cold)? Tell me more about it.
- 3. Empathize, don't argue.** Avoid arguing or using reason. People with dementia lose the ability to follow logic. Be reassuring and agreeable – go along with the delusion. You don't have to say "I see the little men, too!", but be empathetic: "Yes, I know they are upsetting you".
- 4. Try bridge phrases.** Bridge phrases are expressions that help to move things to a new place. They are especially useful when someone is stuck in a particular conversational groove or asks the same questions over and over. For example: The mail hasn't come – that reminds me when Grandpa said he had milk and ice delivered to the door. Did you have a milkman? OR "I like that story. I've also heard that ..." OR "It's such a nice day. Why don't we walk to the bird bath?". The idea is to engage the person in something that's a slight turn from where he or she is now. Find a topic that your loved one finds interesting – childhood reminisces, pets, babies, sports, hobbies.
- 5. Introduce activity alternatives.** Present something specific and different to attend to – a change of scenery, a different activity, a chore you need help with – anything that breaks a pattern of behavior. Moving outside or to a new room or different chair can be diverting. So can offering a favorite

snack. Boredom often fuels repetitive behaviors. Look for engaging activities – purposeful ones such as folding towels, picking up sticks in the yard, or sorting papers. Try music (their favorites from years ago), comedy (a slapstick old movie) or touch (petting a cat or just holding hands).

Paula Spencer Scott is the author of *Surviving Alzheimer's" Practical tips and soul-saving wisdom for caregivers.*