

Keeping the winter doldrums away

By: Amy Sobrino, LCSW

It seems that during winter months, it's always a little harder to stay motivated and active. It's cold, sometimes snowy or icy, and can be so easy to stay inside, wrapped under a blanket or by the fire. As we've discussed in previous *Memory Moment* articles, it can be even more of a challenge to keep active for someone living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia. Dementia makes it difficult for someone to initiate activities. This deficit can show itself in a variety of ways, from not preparing a meal to not starting a crossword puzzle. Keeping a routine with having regular activity is challenging for a person living with Alzheimer's or related dementia, requiring their loved ones to help and make sure their day is structured and active. We know that one of the best things for a person living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia is to keep a regular routine with similar time each day for waking/sleeping, receiving medication, and doing exercise or other activity. So as caregivers, what can we do? Below are several tips to help loved ones and caregivers with this common issue.

Start your day off with a plan

Many caregivers I've worked with start off their morning by planning the day with their loved one. Using a 'checklist' template, daily planner, or calendar can be very helpful in orienting your loved one to a routine. As mentioned above, your loved one may not take the initiation to plan a routine or activity, so it is up to you to help start the process.

Enlist the help of others

As a caregiver, you can't do it alone without your own health and well-being suffering. Give your family and friends tangible ideas to help with the routine and bring activity to your loved one. Set a specific time and something that they have enjoyed together or an activity that your loved one enjoys. For example, have a friend come over for two hours to read the Bible with your loved one. Something meaningful, yet simple. The aspect of socialization mixed with engaging your loved one's brain is the combination we are looking for. Ask grandchildren to read their favorite books to your loved one.

Rethink what is an activity

This brings me to my next point – rethinking what is an activity. From the standpoint of dementia, anything that helps engage your loved one’s brain can be a meaningful activity. Folding up clothes, doing housework, sorting cards, looking at pictures, listening to music...nothing is too small for your loved one to enjoy. In fact, it might just be perfect for the level of cognitive functioning your loved one is at. Keep in mind that an activity now may look a little bit different in content or length.

Try a reminiscence toolkit

We have wonderful, pre-planned activity toolkits at the all of our Forget-Me-Not Resource Centers in our libraries. These kits are meant to help caregivers and families draw from their loved one’s life and enjoyments to engage them in a meaningful way. There is a helpful guide in each kit that can help you get started. If you don’t have a library card, please feel free to check out the kits under Effingham Area Alzheimer’s Awareness.

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.