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Alzheimer's Disease: Tips for Children

Impact on Children

Alzheimer's Disease can have a tremendous impact on your family. Children and teenagers have the same worries, fears and anxieties that you do. Their lack of experience may lead them to display these emotions in ways that parents may not recognize. Children may complain of stomach aches, do poorly in school, stop inviting friends over or even start spending more time away from home.

'We often don't give children enough credit,' says Mary Ann Johnson, program director for the Greater Richmond Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. 'We tend to shield them from things that are not pleasant for us to think about.'

Alzheimer's Disease may not be the most pleasant thing to think or talk about. However, if your child lives in a caregiving family of a person with Alzheimer's, it is a fact of life. Talking to your children is the best way to help them understand the disease that is affecting someone they love. The Alzheimer's Association suggests that parents talk with their children and encourage them to express their feelings. By sharing their feelings, children learn that sadness, embarrassment and fear are acceptable emotions.

Suggestions for Coping

'We live in an aging society,' says Johnson. 'It is important to educate young children about aging. It helps them become more comfortable with older adults. It also helps them understand what it is like to get older. Teaching them that when they get older or their parents get older, they might start to see things differently will help them better understand Alzheimer's Disease.'

The Alzheimer's Association suggests that parents can help children and teens cope with their feelings by:

- Keeping the lines of communication open,

- Offering comfort and support,
- Giving children opportunities to express their feelings,
- Letting children know their feelings are normal,
- Answering questions honestly, and
- Educating children about the disease.

There are also educational programs that teach children how to be good visitors to a person with Alzheimer's. In the Volunteer Visitation program, offered by Johnson, children learn that good visitors:

- **Keep quiet and still:** Loud noises and sudden movements might upset or scare a person with Alzheimer's.
- **Look the person in the eye:** It is important to look the person in the eye. Then even if the person does not recognize the child, he or she will still know that the visitor is there for them.
- **Call the person by name:** Using someone's name keeps the tone of the visit familiar and caring, even if the person cannot remember the visitor.
- **Be patient:** Visitors may be called on to answer the same questions repeatedly. This is part of the disease, try not to become annoyed.

Another important tool for parents is your own experience. As the family caregiver to a person with Alzheimer's, you can help your child in these ways:

- Share your feelings and the knowledge you have gathered from your caregiving experience.
- Teach your children what you have learned about the disease.
- Tell them how you have learned to cope with its effects.
- Offer children advice on how to better communicate and interact with the person with Alzheimer's.
- Above all, never underestimate your child's willingness to help and capacity to care.

Resources

Books are also an excellent tool for parents to use when educating their children about Alzheimer's Disease. There are a number of books on the subject that target different age levels. Look for these books and others at your local library, bookstores and the [Alzheimer's Association virtual library for Kids and Teens](#). Some suggested

reading materials include:

The Alzheimer's Association has a number of resources designed to help parents and teachers educate children on the disease. For books, links, videos and other resources:

⇒ [For Kids](#)

⇒ [For Teens](#)

⇒ [For Parents & Teachers](#)

⇒ [Videos](#)

To locate the chapter in your area, go to:

www.alz.org/local_resources/find_your_local_chapter

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