



Purple Angels Care Notes

A monthly publication for family caregivers and those living with dementia

JULY 2019

Calendar

July 4

Memory Café and Family Picnic
11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Weber's Nature Park

Join us for an old fashioned family picnic on the 4th of July! We'll have a cookout, a sing-a-long, and play BINGO! We meet at Weber's Nature Park, 2901 W 5th Street (see the enclosed flyer for directions).

Please bring lawn chairs!

August 1

Memory Café
11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Marshfield

Aloha 'oe! Join us for a Hawaiian luau party. We'll supply the food and the flower leis, you wear your Hawaiian shirt and summer beach wear. We'll have fun games and prizes, great music, and wonderful food and drinks. This is a memory café you won't want to miss!

Summer Heat Stress and Dehydration

Summer is finally here, and the heat and humidity can be a big concern for the elderly, especially for those with dementia. Dementia can affect how the brain regulates body temperature, and people with dementia can lose the ability to feel when they are too hot. People with dementia can also lose the ability to communicate about how they are physically feeling, so it may be difficult for them to tell you if they are feeling overly warm. Because of this, heat exhaustion and heat stroke can occur. It is important to know the symptoms of heat stress that can lead to these serious conditions. Early warning signs of heat stress include excessive sweating, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache and muscle cramps. Then as exhaustion progresses, symptoms may progress to nausea, vomiting and fainting. Heat stroke is more serious and symptoms include high body temperature, the absence of sweating, confusion, seizure and coma. To avoid heat stress, stay indoors when the temperature and/or humidity is high. Avoid being outdoors during the hottest time of the day. Sit in the shade and wear loose, lightweight clothing. When indoors, sit in air-conditioned rooms or near a fan. Provide cool, damp washcloths if your loved one's body temperature feels higher than normal.

Did you know dehydration increases the symptoms of dementia? When a person does not take in enough fluids, they can become very confused, disoriented, and show an increase in challenging behaviors. Be sure your loved one is drinking lots of water and other cool liquids. Avoid drinks with caffeine or ones heavy in sugar. Offer fresh fruits like watermelon and grapes, or Jell-O and frozen treats. These are another way to stay hydrated.

Caregiver Tips: When your loved one says “I want to go home”

Hearing a loved one say “I want to go home” over and over again is something dementia caregivers often deal with. It’s especially frustrating to hear when they’re already home. You need to respond in a way that calms them down and helps them let go of the idea.

First, it helps to understand why they’re saying this and what they really mean. Next, do your best to not take it personally so you can stay calm too. Then, try a kind, calming response that helps you avoid upsetting your loved one.

Why someone would ask to go home

“I want to go home” is often a request for comfort rather than literally asking to go somewhere.

When responding, the goal is to reduce your loved one’s anxiety or fear so they can let go of the idea. Helping them to stay calm also gives you a chance to check if discomfort, pain, or a physical need is causing this behavior.

Alzheimer’s and dementia damage the brain and cause a person to experience the world in different ways. The kindest thing to do is meet them where they are, focus on comfort and reassurance, and respond to the emotions behind their request.

Not everything you try will work the first time. And even if something works once, it might not work every time. Don’t get discouraged, this will get easier with practice.

Reassure and comfort

Approach your loved one with a calm, soothing, and relaxed manner. If you remain calm, they’ll start calming down too. They’ll pick up on your

body language and tone of voice and will subconsciously start to match you. Sometimes saying “I want to go home” is how they tell you they’re tense, anxious, scared, or in need of extra comfort. If they like hugs, this is a good time for one. Others may prefer gentle touching or stroking on their arm or shoulder or simply having you sit with them. Another way of giving extra comfort and reassurance is to give them a comforting blanket, therapy doll, or stuffed animal to hold.

Avoid reasoning and explanations

Don’t try to explain that they’re in their own home, or they moved in with you 3 years ago. Trying to use reason and logic with someone who has a brain disease will only make them more insistent, agitated, and distressed. They won’t be able to process that information and will feel like you’re stopping them from doing something they know is important.

Agree, then redirect and distract

Being able to redirect and distract is an effective technique. It’s a skill that improves with practice, so don’t feel discouraged if the first few attempts don’t work perfectly. Agree by saying something like “Ok, we’ll go soon.” or “That’s a good idea. We’ll go as soon as I clean up these dishes.” This calms the situation because you’re not telling them they’re wrong.

After agreeing, subtly redirect their attention. This redirection should lead into pleasant and distracting activities that take their minds away from wanting to go home.

*The information in this article comes from
dailycaring.com*

Learn from Your PAST

Purple Angels Support Team Discussion Page



Meeting your loved one's emotional need to "go home"

It's a common challenge for dementia caregivers. A loved one says they want to go home, or maybe they want to go to some other location. The location is usually representative of a feeling they are longing for. For many, "home" represents comfort, safety, familiarity. It can also represent the feelings associated with family, of being loved and cared for. Because of this, some people with dementia may be looking for or asking about their parents or other close relatives. Many times these family members are no longer alive, or the home they want to go to is no longer standing. But this does not mean their request to "go home" is an impossibility. Your role as a caregiver is to meet the emotional need that is represented by your loved one's request. This is your way to take them home.

In the later stages of Alzheimer's, my mom would frequently say she wanted to go home, and she also began asking for her mom and dad. My first response was to reason with her and try to convince her she was home. That didn't work. And I also tried to explain that her parents had died many years ago, and that only caused her more anguish. I finally researched how to deal with these behaviors, and I learned that the request to "go home" was really an attempt to express a need. And I learned that if I could satisfy the need my mom was expressing, I could let her "go home" emotionally.

Think about what "home" means to you, and what it means to your loved one. For my mom, asking to "go home" meant she was looking for a sense of security and familiarity. Her request

was usually in the late afternoon or in the early evening. This was the time of day when she would begin to get tired. It was also a time of day when she was often more confused or disoriented. Once I connected the two, I realized that her request was not for me to take her to some place that was her former home. Instead, it was a request for me to recreate the *feelings* of home. She was telling me she felt lost and confused. She was telling me she was looking for the familiar and for the feeling of security we all associate with "home."

Instead of arguing with her, I would reassure her that I was there and that I wasn't leaving her. Sometimes we would talk about the home or the town where she grew up. If she was asking for her mom, I would say something like, "You miss your mom, don't you? She was a special lady. And I know she was a wonderful cook. Did she teach you how to cook?" And then for a while we could talk about that, and about cooking in general. Sometimes that would lead to discussions about things she liked to cook, as well as favorite recipes.

Two things were happening. One, I was validating her feelings. I wasn't trying to reason with her or convince her she was home. I was acknowledging that her feelings were valid and real. And I would do my best to empathize with her. Second, I looked for ways to redirect her thoughts with pleasant conversations about happy memories of home or family. It didn't always work, but most of the time it did. I was meeting her emotional need to "go home."

Dealing with “I want to go home” using validation and redirection

When your loved ones says, “I want to go home,” it can be a frustrating behavior that is a challenge to deal with, especially if it happens frequently. Remember that while your loved one may be confused, the “home” she is looking for is not necessarily a physical place. Most often your loved one is expressing an emotional need. He might be seeking out a sense of familiarity, or she might be seeking the feeling of safety and security that “going home” represents.

The best way to handle this behavior is to validate the feeling behind the request. Try to uncover why your loved one is feeling lost or confused, anxious or upset. It might be related to the time of day. Or your loved one may be trying to tell you they feel insecure in an environment they do not recognize. First, validate and acknowledge these feelings. Then try some redirection to help your loved one let go of the feelings that are causing him or her to want to “go home.”

You could gently take their elbow while saying “Ok, we’ll go soon” and walk down the hall together to a big window or to the kitchen. Point out some of the beautiful birds and flowers outside or offer a snack or drink they like. Later, casually shift to another activity that’s part of their daily routine.

Another example is saying “Ok, let’s get your sweater so you won’t be cold when we go outside.” Then, while you’re both walking to get

the sweater and chatting about something pleasant, stop for a cup of tea or get involved in an activity they enjoy.

Ask them to tell you about their home. For example: Your home sounds lovely, can tell me more about it? What’s the first thing you’re going to do when you get home? What is your favorite room of the house? Asking about their home validates their feelings, encourages them to share positive memories, and distracts them from their original goal of going home.

Even after trying these strategies, sometimes, your loved one will be stubborn and refuse to let go of the idea of going home no matter how much you try to soothe or redirect. If that happens, you might agree to take them home and then take them on a brief car ride.

Experiment with how far and how long you need to drive before you can go back to where they live without protest. Or, suggest a stop at the ice cream shop, drugstore, or grocery store to distract and redirect.

If it’s not possible to actually take them out or get into the car, the actions of getting ready to leave can still be soothing because it shows that you believe them and are helping to achieve their goal. Meanwhile, the activities of getting ready give you more chances to distract and redirect to a different activity.

The information in this article comes from dailycaring.com

Looking for more information? Check us out!

Marshfield Area Purple Angels is an all-volunteer, tax-exempt (501c3) charitable organization serving the greater Marshfield area. Please visit our website www.marshfieldpurpleangels.org and our Facebook page www.facebook.com/marshfieldpurpleangels for more information.

If you have any questions, call Doug Seubert, dementia specialist, at **715-383-0897** or email doug@marshfieldpurpleangels.org.

