



Telling family and friends

An Alzheimer diagnosis doesn't only affect the person receiving it. The lives of family members and friends may also drastically change. When telling family and friends about a loved one's Alzheimer's diagnosis, consider the following:

- Be honest with family and friends about the person's diagnosis. Explain that Alzheimer's is a brain disease, not a psychological or emotional disorder.
- Share educational materials from the Alzheimer's Association, this website, or another educational site. The more that people learn about the disease, the more comfortable they may feel around the person.
- Invite family to support groups sponsored by your local Alzheimer's Association.
- Realize that some people may drift out of your life, as they may feel uncomfortable around the person or may not want to help provide care.
- Tell family and friends how they can help you and your loved one. Give specific examples like picking up groceries or taking your loved one to appointments.
- Alzheimer's disease can also impact children and teens. Just as with any family member, be honest about the person's diagnosis with the young people in your life. Encourage them to ask questions.

If you're explaining an Alzheimer's diagnosis to a child, consider his or her age and relationship to your loved one to determine how much to share. You might say, "Grandma has a sickness in her brain that's causing her to forget names." Try to answer any questions simply and honestly and listen to the child's concerns. Explain that sadness or anger is normal and that he or she didn't cause the disease. Explain what changes a child might expect to see in his or her loved one — such as not being recognized — and how this might affect the family.

Helping family and friends know how to act

Once you share the diagnosis, explain what your loved one can still do and how much he or she understands. You might offer suggestions for interacting, such as by having people briefly reintroduce themselves and avoiding correcting your loved one if he or she forgets something. Encourage people to engage in activities that are familiar to your loved one.

A young child might look to your example to know how to act around a person who has Alzheimer's. Show that it's OK to talk to your loved one and enjoy normal activities with him or her, such as listening to music or reading stories. Older children might have a harder time accepting the changes Alzheimer's can cause and might feel uncomfortable spending time with a loved one who has Alzheimer's. Avoid forcing the issue. Instead, talk honestly about the child's concerns and feelings.

Keep in mind that some family and friends might have trouble handling the diagnosis. They might feel uncomfortable or drift out of your loved one's life, despite your best attempts to help.

Telling family and friends about a loved one's Alzheimer's diagnosis can be difficult. Being honest and providing information about Alzheimer's disease can go a long way toward helping others understand the situation.