

Helping Family and Friends Understand Alzheimer's Disease

[Español](#)

When you learn that someone close to you has [Alzheimer's disease](#), deciding when and how to tell your family and friends may be difficult. You may be worried about how others will react to or treat your loved one. It's okay to wait until you feel emotionally ready to share the news or to only tell your closest family members and friends. By knowing what is happening, the people you trust the most can help support you and the person with Alzheimer's. The following suggestions can help get you started.



Sharing the diagnosis

It may be hard to share a loved one's Alzheimer's diagnosis with others. Here are a few suggested approaches:

- Realize that family and friends often sense that something is wrong before they are told.
- Be honest with them about the Alzheimer's diagnosis. Explain that Alzheimer's is a brain disease that can have [wide-ranging symptoms](#). Memory loss is a common symptom, but it's not the only one. Changes in behavior and communication are also common.
- Share [resources](#) to help them understand what you and the person with Alzheimer's are experiencing.
- Give examples of ways they can help, such as visiting, providing meals, or helping with home safety modifications. Let them know you need breaks.

Helping family and friends feel comfortable

Family and friends may not know how to interact with someone who has Alzheimer's. Share tips to help them feel more comfortable. You can:

Do's and Don'ts: Communicating with a Person Who Has Alzheimer's Disease



[Read and share this infographic](#) about how to communicate with a person who has Alzheimer's disease.

- Tell people who visit how much your loved one can understand. For example, if the person is still in the early stage of Alzheimer's, you might say that they can still have a conversation over dinner or play a favorite board game.
- If your loved one has difficulty remembering people, suggest that visitors start a conversation with the person by briefly introducing themselves. For example, "Hello George, I'm John. We used to work together."
- Offer [ways to make the conversation easier](#) and more respectful, such as not correcting or arguing with the person with Alzheimer's if they make a mistake or forget something.

- Remind visitors to be patient when the person with Alzheimer's has trouble finding the right words or putting feelings into words.
- Suggest [activities](#) beyond talking that they can do together, including listening to music or looking through a photo album.

Helping children understand

When a family member has Alzheimer's, it affects the whole family, including children and grandchildren. It's important to talk to young people and help them understand what is happening. For example:

- Answer their questions simply and honestly. For example, you might tell a young child, "Grandma has an illness that makes it hard for her to remember things."
- Tell them that feelings of sadness and anger are normal.
- Comfort them. Explain that no one caused the disease. Young children may think they did something to hurt their grandparent.

Younger children may watch how you act around your loved one with Alzheimer's. Do not use "baby talk" or adopt a harsh tone with your loved one — children may pick up on this and act similarly. Try to be mindful of the tone of voice you're using and the way you're interacting with them. It's

important to show children they can still talk with the person and do things with them. Activities children and people with Alzheimer's might do together include:

- Simple arts and crafts
- Playing music or singing
- Looking through photo albums
- Reading stories out loud

If you and your children are living in the same house as someone with Alzheimer's, it's important not to let the caregiving responsibilities overshadow the children's day-to-day needs. For example:



- Avoid having a young child help take care of or “babysit” the person with Alzheimer's. This may not be safe for the child or that person.

- Make sure the child has time for their own interests and needs, such as playing with friends, school activities, or doing homework.
- Spend quality time with your child so they don't feel that all your attention is on the person with Alzheimer's.
- Be honest about your feelings when you talk with kids, but don't overwhelm them.

Some children may not talk about their feelings but may act out at school or at home. Older children and teens might be embarrassed by the behavior of the person with Alzheimer's. Let children know they can always talk to you about what they're feeling. School counselors and social workers also can help children develop healthy ways to process their feelings.

You may also be interested in

- Learning how to [manage personality and behavior changes in Alzheimer's](#)
- Exploring how to [take care of yourself as an Alzheimer's caregiver](#)
- Reading about [activities to do with a family member or friend who has Alzheimer's](#)
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