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ALZHEIMER'S CAREGIVING

Helping Children Understand Alzheimer's Disease

When a family member has Alzheimer's disease, it affects everyone in the family, including children and grandchildren. It's important to talk to them about what is happening. How much and what kind of information you share depends on the child's age and relationship to the person with Alzheimer's.

Helping Kids Cope

Here are some tips to help kids understand what is happening:

- 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."
- Help them know that their feelings of sadness and anger are normal.
- Comfort them. Tell them no one caused the disease. Young children may think they did something to hurt their grandparent.

Talk with kids about their concerns and feelings. Some may not talk about their negative feelings, but you may see changes in how they act. Problems at school, with friends, or at home can be a sign that they are upset. A

school counselor or social worker can help your child understand what is happening and learn how to cope.

A teenager might find it hard to accept how the person with Alzheimer's has changed. He or she may find the changes upsetting or embarrassing and not want to be around the person. Don't force them to spend time with the person who has Alzheimer's. This could make things worse.

Spending Time Together and Alone

It's important to show kids that they can still talk with the person with Alzheimer's disease and help him or her enjoy activities. Many younger children will look to you to see how to act.

Doing fun things together can help both the child and the person with Alzheimer's. Here are some things they might do:

- Do simple arts and crafts
- Play music or sing
- Look through photo albums
- Read stories out loud

If kids live in the same house as someone with Alzheimer's disease:

- Don't expect a young child to help take care of or "babysit" the person.
- Make sure they have time for their own interests and needs, such as playing with friends, going to school activities, or doing homework.
- Make sure you spend time with them, 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.

If the stress of living with someone who has Alzheimer's disease becomes too great, think about placing the person with Alzheimer's into a respite care facility. Then, both you and your kids can get a much-needed break.

For more tips on helping children and teens understand Alzheimer's disease, visit the Alzheimer's Association's Kids and Teens page and AFA Teens.

Read about this topic in Spanish. Lea sobre este tema en español.

For More Information About Helping Kids Understand Alzheimer's

NIA Alzheimer's and related Dementias Education and Referral (ADEAR) Center
800-438-4380
adear@nia.nih.gov
www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers
The NIA ADEAR Center offers information and free print publications about Alzheimer's and related dementias for families, caregivers, and health professionals. ADEAR Center staff answer telephone, email, and written

requests and make referrals to local and national resources.

Alzheimers.gov

www.alzheimers.gov

Explore the Alzheimers.gov website for information and resources on Alzheimer's and related dementias from across the federal government.

National Respite Locator Service

www.archrespite.org/respitelocator

This content is provided by the NIH National Institute on Aging (NIA). NIA scientists and other experts review this content to ensure it is accurate and up to date.

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