

## RESISTANCE

### "I WON'T GO" OR OVERCOMING RESISTANCE IN THE PERSON WITH DEMENTIA

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What do you do when the person you love or care for just "won't go?" Whether it is visiting the physician, attending day care, giving up the car keys, or even using the bathroom, resistance to doing any of these things too often may escalate into a major battle. There are several approaches to overcoming resistance in persons who tend to be defiant or oppositional. But, when dementia prevents the individual from communicating the source of the problem, it may be particularly difficult to handle.

Here is what we hear from caregivers:

"Mother will never see the doctor. I can't treat her like she is a child!"

"When I took my wife to Day Care, she flatly refused to get out of the car."

"Whatever I say, he does the opposite. And he's bigger than I am!"

"The Alzheimer's Association Chapter advised me to take my dad in for a diagnosis. But, I think he's scared that it will confirm his worst fears."

### FIND THE REASON FOR RESISTANCE

To find the best strategy for you and the person with dementia to work this out, it is important to identify the source of the resistance. There are a variety of reasons why your loved one might not want to cooperate with you. Consider these reasons before attempting to change the person's attitude or behavior. The schematic shows several reasons for resistance and lists some basic approaches for addressing them. Reasons may include denial, fear, pride, not being ready, a "stubborn personality," sense of loss, or pure disagreement, to name a few. This article will offer some tips for dealing with these reasons.

### DENIAL

Denial is a strong defense mechanism that helps people to cope with various threats. All of us may use denial to varying degrees when it is difficult to face something. After all, denial keeps us at a safe distance from our problems. It helps us to go about our daily business, protecting us from pain. When one person denies that there is a problem, there is a tendency for the other person to respond by stating an opposing position, giving evidence of the "truth" of the matter, or reasoning with the person.

In most cases, this will only threaten the person further. Someone with dementia may become more confused or upset when confronted by you. You may find that you are facing denial from other family members as well. The following tips are designed to address the resistance when it is based on denial.

One strategy involves reframing your disagreement, focusing on the feelings and preserving the person's dignity. This means redirecting your interaction after affirming and confirming the underlying feelings. Here are some examples of what a caregiver might say when confronted with denial from a person with dementia.

"I know that you feel fine. I understand that you don't need to go to the doctor. Do you like Dr. S.? He has done a good job for our family. He was so helpful when you were concerned about

avoidance, and wait longer than you should to initiate contact with certain agencies or facilities. Planning ahead is critical so that you know what actions are available. Having the facts on hand will enable you to move forward in an efficient and knowledgeable manner when both you and your loved one are ready. Very often, it is your own resistance that blocks the process. You may make assumptions that the person with dementia is not ready, when in fact, it is you who is the most resistant.

In other cases, you may feel that you know what is right for your family member, but the individual feels strongly that Day Care is not an appropriate way to spend time, or the residence visited was not a comfortable place.

In this juncture, look for clues to the fundamental reasons for resistance, as above. Here are some caregiver responses:

"I know you are not ready to see this Care Home. Can we make an appointment just to visit next week? Then, we can spend some time together in the afternoon. Would you like to go shopping?"

"You are right. The people at the Day Care Center are older than you. It seems like you are not ready to start attending the center. Let's wait until next month. Let's plan to call them on the first to see if there are openings."

#### DISAGREEMENT

A simple disagreement is often the precipitating event behind an emphatic show of resistance. When people say "No!" or their body language expresses that sentiment, it is important to respond in some way before emotions escalate or get out of hand. If you handle your disagreement with the person who has dementia by reasoning, citing evidence or defending, you both may lose the battle. An alternative strategy is to first, acknowledge the conflict and give yourself time to think clearly about how to deal with the disagreement. Some people visualize a "Stop Sign" and literally stop the action, take a deep breath, and prepare to answer in a calm way. Next, affirm the person's feelings in some way to let them know you understand that they are being heard. For example, you might say something like, "Oh, you feel strongly about this!" or "You don't like my idea at all, do you?" Then, agree on something. Your goal is not to have the person agree with you, but to establish some common ground upon which to build. "I don't like to bathe you either, but we both want to look nice when your sister visits" or "I know that you don't want to go to the doctor. Going there is not fun, but we both want to get rid of that fever."

#### SIGNALS LOSS

There are times when people with dementia are aware that they are not able to express or communicate their needs. They are not able to do the things they once could do well. At other times, they may be so confused about their surroundings that nothing is familiar. They may sense an intense loss of connection with the world that they know. They may go through a profound grieving process.

In this unpredictable and lonely place, an event may trigger feelings of loss. Unable to deal with these strong feelings, the person with dementia may respond by resisting. The resistance may take many forms, from overt difficult behavior to giving up completely. It is important to validate these emotions, whatever they are, acknowledging that loss has been signaled: "I know that it's frustrating that you can't drive anymore."