

Head off agitation and anger by using a simple technique called “Validation Therapy”

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Mrs. Lang, who has Alzheimer's disease, says she has to prepare a birthday cake for her husband (who actually died several years ago) and insists she has to go to the grocery shop to buy all the necessary ingredients. She is increasingly agitated and angry because she fears the shop will be closed by the time she will be there. How can you handle this situation?

By using a proven technique called “validation therapy” you can help decrease Mrs. Lang's agitation and anger.

With this approach, you neither accept or reject the elder's own reality, and don't argue with them about what they think is true. Instead, you enter their reality and show understanding for their feelings.

You may encourage them to reminisce about how things were “back then” and help bring up pleasant memories of their past.

Here's how you can use this technique effectively:

- ◇ First of all, express understanding and acceptance about what Mrs. Lang is saying. Don't try to explain to Mrs. Lang that her husband is not there anymore, and that there is no reason to prepare a cake.
- ◇ Instead, say something like “A birthday cake is a very kind thought. I'll bet that you bake excellent cakes! What was your husband's name?”
- ◇ Next, use reminiscence to allow Mrs. Lange to express her feelings. She probably misses her husband very much and may be trying to communicate her feelings of loneliness or sadness for the loss of a loved one.
- ◇ Ask her about the first time her and her husband met or their favorite place. Encourage her to tell you about the times in which she used to cook for him. What did she cook and what did her husband like the most.....and so on.
- ◇ Be an attentive, trusted listener to Mrs. Lang. Show that you care and empathize with her feelings. Provide reassurance with a smile and gentle touch, while maintaining eye contact.
- ◇ Reinforce the reminiscence process with sensory stimulation experiences: Softly sing the “happy birthday” tune for her, for example.
- ◇ You could find a picture of Mrs. Lang's husband and look at it together, or if possible gather some cooking items with a characteristic smell, like butter, vanilla or chocolate and hand them to Mrs. Lang to help stimulate her memories.



By following these simple steps, the anger and anxiety triggered by the elder's delusional thoughts will dissipate, leaving space for the positive emotions and feelings evoked by her pleasant memories of the past, which in turn will result in a calmer environment and more relaxed behaviour.

“Validation Therapy provides disoriented elderly people with an empathetic listener, someone who does not judge them but accepts their view of reality. As the trust between the elderly person and the validating caregiver grows, anxiety is reduced, the need for restraints lessens, and the sense of self-worth is restored. Physical and social functioning improve and withdrawal to vegetative state is prevented.”

Naomi Feil

Principles of Validation Therapy

1. All people are unique and must be treated as individuals.
2. All people are valuable, no matter how disoriented they are.
3. There is a reason behind the behavior of disoriented elderly people.
4. Behavior in old age is not merely a function of anatomic changes in the brain, but reflects a combination of physical, social and psychological changes that take place over the lifespan.
5. Elderly people cannot be forced to change their behaviors. Behaviors can be changed only if the person wants to change them.
6. The elderly must be accepted without judgment.
7. Particular life tasks are associated with each stage of life. Failure to complete a task at the appropriate stage of life may lead to psychological problems.
8. When more recent memory fails, older adults try to restore balance in their lives by retrieving earlier memories. When eyesight fails, they use the mind's eye to see. When hearing goes, they listen to sounds from the past.
9. Painful feelings that are expressed, acknowledged and validated by a trusted listener will diminish. Painful feelings that are ignored or suppressed will gain strength.
10. Empathy builds trust, reduces anxiety, and restores dignity.

Adapted from *The Validation Breakthrough: Simple Techniques for Communicating with People with Alzheimer's Type Dementia*

Benefits of Validation Therapy	Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Residents maintain their dignity and better able to control behaviours ◇ Fewer explosive behaviour responses ◇ Decreased use of physical and chemical restraints ◇ Less staff burnout—decrease in staff turnover ◇ Increase in staff moral, productivity and job satisfaction ◇ Allows family members to help resolve past conflicts and to cope with their own losses ◇ Decreased incidents of falls, wandering and side effects of medications ◇ Person with dementia deteriorates at a slower rate ◇ Families have greater appreciation of their loved ones 	<p>Alzheimer's Care Guide, Sept-Oct 09</p> <p>The Validation Breakthrough, Simple Techniques for Communicating with People with Alzheimer's Type Dementia Naomi Feil 1993</p>

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better. It's not. "

Dr. Seuss

Katherine Punch Resource Library

For more information on dementia visit the Alzheimer Society's resource library.

Upcoming Events—

**Alzheimer Education Conference 2010
How Dementia Changes Our World:
Impact on Professional and Family Caregivers**

**Friday, March 26, 2010
Algoma's Water Tower Inn
360 Great Northern Road
Phone: 949-8111**

Early Bird Registration: \$50. per person
Registration after March 5th: \$55. per person

Cancellation Fee—\$10. No refund after March 19th
To register call **942-2195**

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