

How to talk to someone with Alzheimer's: one caregiver weighs in

At the age of 73, Janet Noble is not a child and her husband Tom refuses to speak to her as if she were.

"No baby talk," says the retired Windsor teacher.

With the guiding support of the [Alzheimer Society of Windsor-Essex](#), Tom has cared for his wife at home since she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease about a year ago. "We talk quite normally. We kid around and she'll kid me right back," he says.



When one of Janet's doctors recently referred to her diapers, Tom stepped in and corrected him.

"I said, 'Wait a minute -- they are not diapers, they are Depends. Diapers are for babies.' I used to be a teacher so I have no problem correcting people," he says with a laugh.

Straightforward approach works best

Tom was especially pleased to hear how another doctor spoke to Janet when she complained during a memory test that she couldn't remember what country she lived in.

The doctor explained in a straightforward way that Janet had lost a lot of her memory and many people have the same problem. "He said, 'We're here to help you, and you've got friends and family,'" recalls Tom.

How to avoid frustration

While conversation between husband and wife remains on an adult level, Tom does have special strategies for engaging Janet and avoiding frustration.

He'll often use their dog Sophie, whom Janet adores, as a distraction if the conversation starts to get upsetting for either of them.

Tom will look over at the dog and ask what she is doing. Usually that's enough to refocus the conversation.

Don't let her see your tears

Tom says Janet has always been a happy person who likes to have people around and that hasn't changed. It's no stretch then for Janet's family to show their love for her.

"And it comes back to us," says Tom. "Yes we've had tears and there's sadness, but we don't show it in front of her," he says. "Positive thinking. No negative thinking. We like to have fun."

The Alzheimer Society's [Early Detection Checklist](#) is a good way to keep track of early warning signs.

Keep your communication positive with [these tips](#).

Photo: Glenn Ogilvie, Sarnia, ON.