

Telling Young Children About Alzheimer's

It is important that children, even young children, are given information about a relative with Alzheimer's disease. Although they may find it difficult to understand, it helps kids deal with changes in a loved one's behavior.

Your goal is to inform children -- without frightening them -- about how Alzheimer's disease is affecting a person, and to give them information in a way they can easily understand.

How and When to Tell Children About Alzheimer's Disease

When and how you tell a child about the disease will depend on how often the child sees the relative and how severe that person's dementia is. If the child lives in the same house then changes in behavior and health will mean that information can be given in a more gradual way.

-You can use a child's remarks as a starting point for conversation: "Why did Grandpa forget my name?" "Why does Grandpa have to be taken to the bathroom?"

-You can tell a child a story about someone with the same disease and then relate it to his or her Grandma/Grandpa/loved one.

-You must keep a child informed.

It will reassure the child and allow him or her to be included in family discussions and decisions.

Key Features About Alzheimer's Disease for Children

- Alzheimer's is a disease that affects the brain and makes it hard to remember things.
- Someone with Alzheimer's has problems thinking and remembering so they often need help with things such as dressing, making meals and with other everyday activities.
- Say that doctors are trying to find a cure for the disease.
- It may be important to tell a child how difficult it can be to take care of someone with Alzheimer's disease. For example, the caregiver may get upset and tired and not always have the time they want to spend with the child. This may make the child unhappy and angry at times. It is important to encourage children to talk through their feelings, which will show them that you care about them.
- Encourage the child to ask questions. That way you know what they want to know and they can indicate to you what depth of information they need.

- Encourage the child to help their relative and praise them.
- Encourage contact but do not enforce it. It would be unfair to make a child stay in the room with a person with Alzheimer's when the person's behavior frightens them. However, it can often help if you can explain to the child what is happening and show him or her how you deal with the situation in a loving and respectful way.
- Give the child some ideas about what activities their loved one with Alzheimer's will enjoy, such as looking at photos, drawing, cooking together, etc.

It is important that you tell the child that the person with Alzheimer's still loves them.

Source and Courtesy: http://alzheimers.about.com/od/kids/a/Explain_alz.htm