

The Peter Rabins Alzheimer's Family Support Center

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TIPS FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

Learning Not to Argue

Video Script - to view video go to www.hopkinsmedicine.org/rabins_alzheimers

Rabins: Family caregivers have to get used to the fact that their loved one lives in a different reality, a different world than they do. Because of their forgetfulness, they don't know what's happened recently, and often they don't remember the things that have happened in the remote past.

Caregiver: You have to lie a little too. He'd say to me, "where did mother go?". And I'd say, "John, your mother died 15 years ago." But then I learned to say, "She went for a walk. She'll be back in awhile." That would satisfy him.

Rabins: Why would you? That would satisfy him.

Caregiver: Yeah, that would satisfy him.

Rabins: But when you used the word lie, I think that would upset a lot of people.

Caregiver: I know.

Rabins: What do you consider a lie?

Caregiver: Well it's -- what do you call it, a white lie. His mother is dead and he doesn't realize this and to talk about it he doesn't understand. But if I say she'll be back in a few minutes, then he would forget and he'd be ok. So this is what I mean, you have to think of their comfort.

Rabins: Arguing with them, trying to correct them rarely helps, almost always makes the person more upset because, of course, to them mother is still alive. The

question then becomes what's the best way to help this person with a disease live in a world when they believe things to be true that aren't.

Caregiver: It's not benefiting her because if I try to correct and she becomes anxious, what have I achieved? Nothing. You know and anxiety seems to make her more forgetful. When she is less anxious she is able to respond to things better and she more accurately knows what's going on.

Caregiver: If Jim would say, "The children hid this, that or the other thing," you know his wallet, his watch, whatever, he couldn't find it, if I had just said, instead of saying, "Jim, that's wrong; the children would not do this," which made him angrier, if I had learned to say-- which I don't think I ever did-- "Jim, that's okay, I'll look for it later," that would have been a far better technique.

► Find the Ways to Accept their Reality

Rabins: Entering their reality, either distracting them or redirecting them, or even agreeing with something that's not true, if that makes that person feel better, justifies telling what really is a lie or fib.

Caregiver: Probably the best advice I can give to anybody dealing with Alzheimer's patients is not to argue.

Rabins: What do you mean argue?

Caregiver: Just challenging everything they say.

Caregiver: My mother had come into the room and said

to me, “I’ve got a purple and pink striped cow in the living room,” my response would have been, “Should I milk it or move it?” Just agree with her entirely. I always had the philosophy that if I entered her world and didn’t challenge anything she said, and just made her comfortable and went along with everything, the two of us got along beautifully.

Caregiver: I would try to reason, because I didn’t know any better. What I’ve learned, whatever she says, you do not sit and reason. You do not try to correct her. You just go with it.

Rabins: And that’s made things much better?

Caregiver: Yeah, as bizarre as it may be, you just go with it.

Rabins: Some people actually see things that are not real: See family members. See animals. See insects. We call these visual hallucinations. They’re perceptions without a real stimulus, but to the ill person, they are as vivid and real as when we see something. For that reason, it’s best not to argue with the person.

Caregiver: She would be hallucinating and looking out the window and think she saw her sisters. And she’d want to go there with them. And that was a real issue. We finally, when her hallucinations got so bad one night, she was up literally all night.

► Find Ways to Grow Through Caregiving

Rabins: Caring for somebody with Alzheimer’s Disease is often difficult. It’s particularly so when you as a caregiver have to tell a non-truth or have to avoid telling the truth. I think this is a great example of what makes caregiving hard, and yet, it’s the relationship that’s important. However, this kind of challenging situation helps us appreciate the fact that it’s the caring and love for the person that persists. The fact that we have to distract them becomes trivial when we know that what we’re doing is helping them live a better life and enjoy life to the maximum.