



Caregiver Network News

A newsletter for caregivers of loved ones with dementia

2021 Bearfootin' Art Walk & Auction

Hendersonville merchants **Sherman's, Homestead, Moe's Original BBQ, Attorneys Title-NC, and RE/MAX Realty** joined to sponsor MemoryCare with a bear in the **2021 Bearfootin' Art Auction!**

Our **"Forget Me Not"** Bear, painted by artist Natalie Bennett, is located front of Sherman's Sporting Goods on Main Street at 2nd Street and bidding is now LIVE!

Visit the link below to bid on the virtual platform:

[Bid Now](#)



Dr. Margaret Noel, MemoryCare Founder, with our Forget Me Not Bear

Anger and Dementia



"Mom has gotten so argumentative!"

"My husband blows up at the least little thing."

"My wife was always so easy to get along with, but now she gets upset with me whenever I try to help."

“I can handle his forgetfulness, I can handle his questions, but I can’t handle all this anger.”

In the last issue of CNN, we addressed Caregiver Anger. This month, we look at anger from a different perspective: that of the person living with dementia.

It’s a common symptom of many cognitive disorders. A formerly pleasant and agreeable person suddenly becomes unpredictably volatile and hot-tempered, often over something which - to us - appears to be nothing. And when we try to help or explain, it seems to get even worse. We become frustrated, they become frustrated...and the pattern repeats over and over because we simply don’t know what to do.

Some families, especially spouses, turn to counseling to help restore the relationship to what it was before. However, as effective as counseling can be in other situations, dementia skews the process. The very skills needed for a person to understand his or her behavior and the reasons behind it are the very skills that dementia typically destroys...and it does it early in the disease, often before anyone realizes that it’s even there.



There is usually a perfectly reasonable and rational explanation for the anger – that is, from the person with dementia’s point of view! Despite what we may think, they aren’t doing this deliberately, nor do they have control over it, nor is it even their fault. It’s caused by their dementia, or more precisely, by the changes that dementia has wrought in their brain. They don’t understand it any more than you do, nor do they understand why YOU’RE mad at THEM. In truth, if those same changes were happening in your brain, you’d be acting strangely too, probably without even realizing it.

Understanding how dementia changes a person’s brain is the first step towards learning better ways to manage our loved ones’ moods. There are two functions of the brain that are the main culprits in this scenario: our thinking center and our emotional center.

A. Loss of Logical Thought

This change is nearly impossible to notice in a person, yet it is frequently one of the earliest symptoms of brain failure. Our brains are wired to take in data around us, assess it, and come to a logical, rational conclusion. However, most dementias go after the part of the brain that does this. A person who used to be able to make logical decisions and show sound judgment now starts making crazy accusations or unreasonable assumptions or gets upset over things that, well, don’t make sense to us. But because of dementia, it’s how their brain works now, and it’s different from what it was before.

And how do we typically respond? We explain to the person WHY such-and-such isn’t so, expecting them to understand. But here’s the conundrum: the part of the brain that’s responsible for logical thought is also the part that allows us to comprehend the “why,” to understand explanations. It’s much like someone explaining something to you in Swahili. Try as you might, you can’t get it. You become frustrated...and if you’re a person with dementia, your frustration can escalate pretty quickly to - you guessed it - Anger.

So the first thing you have to do is stop explaining.



B. Loss of Emotional Control

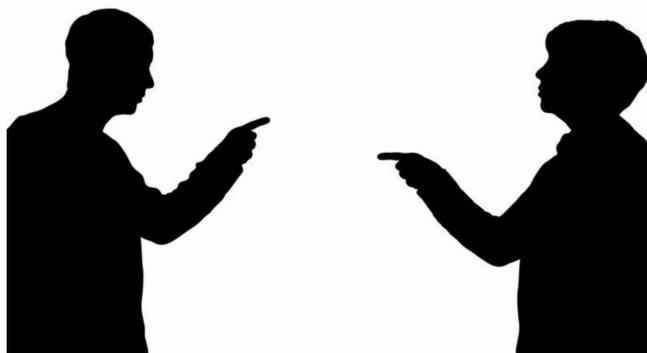
The brain's emotional center, the amygdala, is where we house our feelings, our reactions, our moods, our likes and dislikes. It's an area of the brain that needs some management – imagine what would happen if our feelings were allowed to run wild with no regulation, no limits, no supervisor? We all learned as very young children about controlling our emotions, and as we became adults, our “emotion police” became skilled in keeping us from saying or doing inappropriate things, or overreacting, or misunderstanding intent.

Unfortunately, our emotion police live in the same area of the brain as logical thought – so for a person with dementia, this means their emotion police have taken a hit from dementia and are no longer on the job. Those of us with fully-functioning brains have the same amygdala, the same emotional center as a person with dementia – but the difference is, ours is being managed. Theirs is not. We can typically control our emotional outbursts, we typically have appropriate responses in most situations, because our emotion police are doing their job. Persons with dementia, on the other hand, often finds themselves *controlled by* their emotions instead of the other way around. Losing their higher thinking skills means they're losing their ability to control their moods. As author Judy Cornish says, “When we can no longer understand why, we take everything personally.”

How does this show up? A person with dementia forgets things and becomes frustrated. In an effort to help, we start explaining. That, in turn, just adds to their frustration because their brain can't follow explanations (see A). Then their feelings, which are unpredictable anyway because there's no supervisor on the job (see B), go immediately from zero to sixty...and voila! Full-on Anger! The people around them, who don't realize what's going on in the person's brain, are equally frustrated - and possibly angry as well - but for very different reasons. And before we know it, our well-intentioned explanation takes a left turn into an out-and-out argument.

We think they're being mean to us, but from their point of view, it feels like we're the ones who are being mean to them. Something needs to change...because as Albert Einstein said, if you keep doing the same thing you've been doing, is anything going to change?

So the next thing you have to do is stop arguing.



All of this is easier said than done, you say. That's true, but there are a few simple things you can try that might avoid those nasty spats that seem to come from nowhere:

Take a break. Sometimes just leaving and trying again in a few minutes can give you a chance for a do-over. Take a few deep breaths and say “You know what, let’s talk about this another time.” Remind yourself that this is happening because your loved one’s brain is on the fritz and is causing problems. Try again later with a different approach.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

Look for triggers. To properly address anger in a person whose emotional center has gone haywire, you must first identify the trigger. Are they in pain? Constipated? Hungry? Tired? Are they over- or under-stimulated? Are they afraid or lonely? Do they feel threatened? Are they frustrated or anxious because they can’t think things through like they used to? Are people around them talking too much? The reasons are myriad.

Try to think about what happened right before the outburst. What was the person doing? What were *you* doing? Maybe it’s something as simple as you blocking their view of the television. Or maybe there’s a pattern that’s repeating? For instance, if he gets angry whenever you try to help, that may be the trigger. Instead of offering to help, you might try backing off and allowing him some autonomy. Or perhaps she’s tired. Most persons living with dementia can become quite fatigued by the afternoon and may get fractious if there’s too much going on. Try to schedule more activity in the morning and give her a break in the afternoon.

It would make things a lot easier if your loved one could identify the issue themselves and communicate that to you - “I’m feeling really confused right now so please don’t ask me to do anything else” or “Something hurts but I’m not sure how to tell you what it is” – but alas, not being able to do that is another common symptom of a brain that’s undergoing changes from dementia.

Triggers usually fall into one of three categories :

- An *unmet need* they may have, either physical or emotional (bodily discomfort, frustration, boredom, fear, etc.)
- Something *bothersome* going on around them (activity, people, noise, environment)
- How someone is *interacting* with them (arguing, becoming angry or frustrated with them)
- Eliminate the trigger...and you go a long way towards reducing the anger.



Be aware of negative messaging. Body language and voice tone can often send a different message than what you may have intended and can be the trigger that starts an argument – or as one caregiver put it, something that “pokes the bear.” For instance, there are two ways to say “it’s time to get ready.” One is with a pleasant voice tone and a smile: “Hey, let’s get ready to go. Here’s your jacket. We can stop by your favorite ice cream store on the way!” The other is tinged with impatience and criticism: “It’s time to go, hurry up, you’re going to make us late again!” Which one do you think will get the better response from a person whose brain isn’t getting the whole picture?

In a perfect world, you would always say just the right thing and your loved would always have a textbook response – “Sure, I’ll be right there!” – but caregivers know that seldom happens. If you don’t get the answer you wanted when you ask nicely, don’t give up and automatically fall back into Argument Mode. Changing how you communicate is a process, not a quick fix. Be mindful that you may need a try a few different tactics from this list before you learn how not to “poke the bear.”

Check your expectations. We often focus on what’s wrong with the other person instead of recognizing the part we played in causing the problem. “Anger is a form of communication,” says gerontologist Dr. Lakelyn Hogan. “The person with dementia may not be able to tell us what they want or need. Anger is one way for them to release their frustration and emotion.” Caregivers can inadvertently set their loved ones up to fail, then become irritated when the interaction doesn’t go as expected: “I reminded her three times about this and she said OK – why is she now refusing to go?!” Telling something to a person with dementia means you expected them to understand it and remember it– and

Understanding and Remembering is an area of the brain where dementia frequently causes the most damage. Review the situation and ask yourself if maybe you forgot to adjust your expectations around what your loved one can handle.

Let it go and change the subject. Focus on something else, somewhere else. Find something interesting outside. Bring up a favorite memory from the person's life story. Talking about happy experiences, looking at photos, or even offering favorite foods can sometimes change a bad mood into a good one. And as both of your moods improve, you might even be more willing to...



Channel the power of "I'm sorry." It may seem counter-intuitive, but saying you're sorry can often be the magic words for a person whose amygdala is going haywire. Try arguing with a person who says "I'm sorry." It's nearly impossible. Apologizing is a great way to bring down someone's anger and diffuse an argument. Simply put, it gives you an instant do-over. Yes, you may be apologizing for something that isn't your fault, but understand that this isn't a competition. It's dementia, and dementia doesn't play by the rules. Using an apology as an anti-argument tool may feel a bit odd, but it's expedient: "Dad, I'm sorry, I said the wrong thing. I'll do better next time. I love you." See if it doesn't make things a little better...for both of you.

Susan Macaulay (*My Alzheimer's Story*) created an acronym to help caregivers better handle anger in their loved ones. She calls it BANGS:

- B** – Breathe (because holding your breath deprives your brain of oxygen so you can't think straight)
- A** – Acknowledge and Agree ("Yes, Mom, you're right, you ARE a good driver" keeps you from arguing)
- N** – Never argue, Never correct, Never explain
- G** – Go with the flow and Get over it
- S** – Say I'm Sorry (and leave the attitude out of it!)

When a person living with dementia gets angry, it's easy to see it as their fault. Next time, try to remind yourself that a lot of that anger means dementia is just jerking their chain again. Anger may be the only way they can let you know that they are struggling, that their brain isn't doing what they want it to do. Remember that their brain isn't working like yours is. If you want to avoid an argument, you'll probably have to make some changes in how you respond; otherwise you may find yourself poking that bear again.



MemoryCaregivers Network

Peer Support & Education Groups

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all MemoryCaregivers Network Support Groups are being held online only (via Zoom) every 1st, 3rd, and 4th Tuesday from 1:00-3:00pm.

Network meetings are open to the public. Participants will receive a link via email the day before each meeting.

If you are not currently attending a MemoryCaregivers support group, please email network@memorycare.org to join the mailing list. If you do not use email but would like to talk with a support facilitator, please call Mary Donnelly at 828.230.4143.

For more information about the MemoryCaregivers Network, contact:

Mary Donnelly
828.230.4143
network@memorycare.org

Pat Hilgendorf
828.301.0740
patricia.hilgendorf@gmail.com

*Mary and Pat are available on the 2nd Tuesday of every month as well.
Contact Mary for additional information if interested in participating.*

The Network relies on charitable support to keep its program going .

[Donate Now](#)

Caregiver College



A series of six lectures will be provided for caregivers of persons with memory disorders. Sessions are designed to improve caregiver understanding of different aspects of dementia care. The course is led by MemoryCare staff members and attorney Caroline Knox.

2021 Course Schedule

Thursdays from 2:00-5:00 pm

Fall
Oct 7 to Nov 11

Winter
Jan 13 to Feb 17 (2022)

Until further notice, Caregiver College will be provided as **live-broadcast for online attendance only**. The ability to access Zoom through a computer, tablet or smartphone with a reliable internet connection is necessary to attend. *If you are unable to attend virtually, please contact us to be placed on a communications list for the next in-person attendance opportunity.* **Related course materials will be provided via email.**

Registration is required. Please call our office at 828-771-2219 or email education@memorycare.org to register.

Move for Memory

**Now EXTENDED through
December 16th!!!**

*(if you were previously registered, you do
not need to re-register to continue
attending)*

Join us for MemoryCare's Adult Exercise Program, led by Dr. Tiffany Salido! **Classes are free and open to the public and will be provided weekly through Zoom for online attendance** (choose which day(s) of the week to attend below).

***"Whether sitting or standing,
my wife and I get exercise, have fun,
sing along and drink our water.
Tiffany is a Godsend!"*** - Move for
Memory Participant



This class is intended for people with memory impairment to participate *with* their caregiver in fun and simple exercises. The exercises incorporate movements that can improve daily activities and general mobility. Group exercise will be approximately 40 minutes, followed by a time to answer questions. Exercises can be performed standing or seated.

Please note you will be required read and acknowledge a disclaimer when registering to join. The ability to access Zoom through a computer, tablet or smartphone with a reliable internet connection is necessary to attend. Email education@memorycare.org or call 828-771-2219 with questions.

Mondays

9:30 - 10:30 am
through December 13

[Register for Mondays](#)

Thursdays

9:30 - 10:30 am
through December 16

[Register for Thursdays](#)

Learning to Dance with Dementia:

A two-part workshop to build caregiver communication skills

Thursday, December 2 & 9

2:00 - 3:30 pm via Zoom

Online attendance only

Register

Symptoms of dementia can create chaos in families. Relationships are changing and nobody is sure what to do. Everyone's trying to follow the steps of this unfamiliar dance. When should you lead? When should you follow? How do you keep from stepping all over each other's toes? While there's no perfect strategy that works every time, there are some routines you can learn that may help you and your loved one get back in step again.

These two sessions will focus on the importance of communication – what to keep, what to let go, and when to let dementia take the lead. Using real-life scenarios that the class provides, you'll get to practice some new steps which may help you and your dance partner start moving together a little better.

Before the workshop begins, we will email you to request if you would like us to discuss a particular scenario or situation that is challenging for you and your loved one. We will address as many as possible in the two sessions.



Mary Donnelly has been a part of MemoryCare since 2003 – first as a caregiver when her mother became a patient, and now as coordinator of the MemoryCaregivers Network. Currently, Mary co-facilitates several area peer support groups, edits an online bi-monthly newsletter, Caregiver Network News, and is a frequent speaker on dementia issues. Mary is a Mentor/Trainer/Consultant for Teepa Snow, national dementia expert.

Do you need a program for a group event?



The MemoryCaregivers Network staff presents on a variety of subjects, including Recognizing Early Warning Signs of Memory Loss, Facts and Fiction about Dementia, Better Communication Techniques, and more.

We are happy to speak at your event to raise awareness and knowledge about Dementia. Contact Mary Donnelly at network@memorycare.org

To see a list of
OTHER COMMUNITY RESOURCES

CLICK HERE

Contact network@memorycare.org for more information.

Subscribe to Caregiver Network News



is a charitable non-profit organization whose mission is three-fold:

To provide specialized medical care to older adults with cognitive impairment; to support caregivers with education, counseling, and improved access to services; and to provide community education.

We rely on charitable donations to continue these programs!

Please consider donating...
perhaps in honor of a loved one's birthday...
or a memorial...
or a sustaining gift to support families like yours
who depend on the services that MemoryCare provides!

Make a difference. Make a donation.

Thank you for your interest and support!

Donate
Now

Visit Our Website

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