



Caregiver Network News

*A newsletter for caregivers
of loved ones with dementia*

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

Presented by Mary Donnelly

MemoryCaregivers Network Coordinator

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.

Give!Local

MountainXpress 2021 Online Giving Campaign



MemoryCare is grateful to be a part of the 2021 MountainXpress Give!Local Campaign, running November 1 through December 31!

Mountain Xpress' Give!Local Guide is Asheville's easiest path to year-end giving. G!LG showcases small, medium and large organizations whose missions fall into seven categories:

Animals, Community, Creativity & Literacy, Education, Environment, Health & Wellness and Social Justice. 100% of your donation goes to the nonprofits you select. Give!Local's mission is to raise funds and awareness for 46 worthy local nonprofits that are making a big difference where we live — and to make philanthropy simple and fun, no matter how small or large the gift.

Click below to support MemoryCare through Give!Local and to learn more about the campaign:

<https://givelocalguide.org/nonprofits/memorycare/>

100% of proceeds go directly to the nonprofit(s) you select. Thank you Mountain Xpress for supporting nonprofit organizations and their work in our community!

Tips for Visiting



“I’m dreading the holidays this year. The last time I saw my Mom she didn’t seem interested in anything I was telling her, and there were times that I didn’t think she even knew who I was. How can I make my visit with her more satisfying?”

It’s difficult when a loved one with dementia is unable to engage in conversations the way they used to, but this doesn’t mean you can no longer have a good visit with them. You just have to find new ways to do it.

First, understand that dementia typically affects the brain’s language center, especially the part that processes spoken words. This means that for most people with dementia, even those in earlier stages, traditional back-and-forth conversation may not work anymore and may frustrate both of you. You may need to accept that your loved one who USED to enjoy hearing all about your new job and all the kids’ activities and your latest vacation trip may now have lost the ability to follow along with all of that. So as much as you’re dying to share all that’s going on in your life, you will actually want to try dialing it back, getting rid of a lot of the details, and simplifying what you say.

In other words: for a person living with dementia, *less is more*.

This means choosing ONE part of your trip or ONE activity the kids did over the summer, and showing only 3 or 4 photos, not the whole album. And if Mom’s response is maybe a little less enthusiastic as it once would have been, or if she loses interest after only a few minutes, remind yourself that her brain is changing and she’s doing the best she can with what she has to work with. Be focused on quality, not quantity; a few minutes may not seem like much to you but it’s probably all she can manage at one time. If the two of you

enjoy the time together, even if it's short, then the visit has been successful.

This strategy can work for a person living either at home or in a long-term care setting. One of the mistakes many families make when visiting a person in a facility is to focus on “here and now” questions: “What have you been doing?” “Do you like your roommate?” “How’s the food?” “Do you like playing bingo?” “Do you go outside much?” “Have you been watching TV?” and so on. For a person whose brain doesn’t work as well as it used to, answering a lot of questions can be stressful...especially if most of those questions involve the present. Because of short-term memory loss – a common symptom of most dementias – the person typically has more trouble remembering recent events than those which are long past. Asking them about something from their childhood or early adulthood has a better chance of connecting with those long-term memories that are still accessible.



You can get the ball rolling by asking them about something you know from their past: “Tell me about the time the dog ate the Thanksgiving turkey” or “You and your sister used to play hide-and-seek in the hayloft” or “I saw some roses the other day that reminded me of the beautiful garden you used to grow. You had so many flowers!” Be sure to keep your sentences short and allow pauses to give the person time to respond. Don’t worry if your loved one doesn’t always remember – you can tell the story yourself if you know it, and not only will they enjoy hearing it, it may help them recall something else. If possible, have a photo or other visual reminder to help them along. There’s a lot of truth to the old saying, “A picture’s worth a thousand words!” Rather than asking “Who is this?” offer a comment to help jog their memory: “Oh, here’s your brother Howard. I think this must be that cabin where you would go in the summer.”



Your loved one’s ability to use words and language will change as their dementia progresses. Typically too many words will confuse or frustrate them, and they may appear uninterested or even anxious. Pay attention to how your loved one speaks: if it’s with only a few words or short phrases, try to match it. For instance, when looking at some animal pictures on your tablet, instead of saying, “Oh look, here’s a herd of elephants, they’re enormous!” you might just say simply, “Elephants.” Wait and see if the person responds. If so, go with what they say; if not, point to the picture and repeat “elephants.” The idea is to give them plenty of time to process what they’re seeing. This kind of conversation may be a lot different than what you were used to, but it may also be just what your loved one needs at this moment to stay connected with you.

If you can’t think of what to say, come prepared with some Conversation Starters that may help you get started: “If your feet could talk, what would they say?” or “What was the best present you ever got?” and see where they lead. Remember that a person with dementia may not be completely accurate with what they say, but that’s OK. The goal is that you and your loved one have a few minutes together that you can both enjoy.



Finally, use humor! Look for anything that will make your loved one laugh – funny pictures, silly songs, colorful socks, crazy hats...you get the idea. This may be a good way to get the kids involved. Laughing is good for everyone, and for people living with dementia, it’s a welcome relief from trying to keep up with all the confusion going on around them.

The bottom line is, while dementia may have taken away a lot of who your loved one used to be, there’s still a lot left. Rather than focusing on what’s gone, look for new ways to reach this person you cherish, even if it’s only for a few moments.

Here are some more tips to try:

1. Bring holiday pictures of family and friends from the past.
2. Play video messages from family or friends.
3. Bring things related to the season that might spark recognition.

4. Sing or listen to a familiar holiday song, or even play “name that tune” – you start the song and see if the person can continue.
5. Bring along your sewing basket, button box, or tool kit to organize together.
6. Watch a favorite holiday movie. Musicals are especially good. (It’s OK if your loved one doesn’t last through the whole thing)
7. Give a gentle hand massage with lotion.
8. Bring artwork from the children in the family.
9. If the person likes animals, bring a well-behaved pet to visit. Or try one of the realistic dogs or cats that can sit quietly in the person’s lap.
10. Make a “memory box” by filling a decorated shoe box with familiar objects.
11. Take a walk together.
12. Bring along children or grandchildren and watch them play (be sensitive about too much activity and noise)
13. Look at old Christmas or birthday cards.
14. Read *The Night Before Christmas* aloud.
15. Find a small tabletop tree and help your loved one decorate it.
16. Invite the person to help with simple holiday activities like decorating cookies or setting the table. Remember to simplify the task to make it less confusing.
17. Recite nursery rhymes and songs from both your childhoods.
18. If you play a musical instrument, bring it along and play something.
19. Give the person a hug when you arrive and when you leave.

Adapted from Crossroads Hospice, January 2016 ([original here](#))

Consider sharing this article with other family and friends to help them know how best to visit with a person living with dementia. And remind them that what is said isn’t as important as their **presence**. ([Click here to read more](#)).

After all, the holidays are all about being together.



More Holiday Tips

Click the links below for more helpful tips on visiting!

[9 Tips on Visiting Someone with Dementia](#)

[15 Best Practical Gifts for Seniors](#)

[5 Worst Tech Gifts for Seniors \(and what to give instead\)](#)

[Prepare Family Before Holiday Visits with Seniors](#)

[10 Best Holiday Gifts for Caregivers](#)



MemoryCare Programs and Events

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 with guest lecture by attorney Caroline Knox, Esq.

2022 Course Schedule

Thursdays from 2:00-5:00 pm

Winter

Jan 13 to Feb 17

Spring

April 14 to May 19

Until further notice, Caregiver College will be provided as **alive-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 into 2022!!!

(if you were previously registered for the 2021 courses ending December 16, you will need to re-register for the new 2022 course dates beginning on January 10)

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.

2021 Registration

Mondays

Thursdays

9:30 - 10:30 am
through December 13

[Register for Mondays](#)

9:30 - 10:30 am
through December 16

[Register for Thursdays](#)

2022 Registration

Mondays

9:30 - 10:30 am
January 10 through May 23

[Register for Mondays](#)

Wednesdays

9:30 - 10:30 am
January 12 through May 25

[Register for Wednesdays](#)

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](#)

Caregiver Network News and The MemoryCaregivers Network are auxiliary programs of MemoryCare. *Caregiver Network News* is written and compiled by Mary Donnelly. 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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Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the Charitable Solicitation
Licensing Section at 919-814-5400. The license is not an endorsement by the State.*