

## Seven Golden Rules for Caregivers Serving Dementia/Alzheimer's Clients

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Caregiving to an individual with Dementia or Alzheimer's disease is a constant...and often... aggravating challenge. Been there? Done that? Every day brings another unknowing experience which challenges the Caregiver to remain involved with and committed to being a primary resource to the Dementia or Alzheimer's client. Why? The Caregiver often becomes the only close confidant of the client and begins to assume the burden of the client...which may conflict also with the Caregiver's individual quality of life. What is the result? Both the Caregiver and client become both confused, challenged and often aggravated that neither individual has a solution to the circumstance or condition that the demented individual is attempting to understand. What is the Dementia/Alzheimer's client most dreaded fear? Being alone!

The best clinical practice or therapeutic approach to establishing a comfort level for both the Caregiver and the demented individual is not simple and should involve key behavioral management and effective communication techniques. What are these special Caregiver Golden Rules for Dementia/Alzheimer's Clients? Experience of this fifty-year pharmacist and Healthcare Advocate™ while serving Dementia/Alzheimer's clients has defined the following Golden Rules.

The first Caregiver Golden Rule for Dementia/Alzheimer's Clients is the idea known as therapeutic fibbing. Considerable commentary exists in the public domain and psychiatric literature regarding use of this approach. Experts recommend lying to, or bending the truth, in order to avoid increased agitation from a person with Dementia/Alzheimer's. This actually relieves the guilt of a Caregiver or family member that often comes from lying to a loved one. The lie, or falsehood, may very well be the kindest thing that can be said. The ethics of therapeutic fibbing, or telling a falsehood, can help soothe and maintain the quality of life for both the demented client and the Caregiver. This approach decreases the anxiety in a demented patient or one with Alzheimer's. This is also the best way to reduce a Caregiver's stress while also reducing the stress of the individual with Dementia. Importantly, the Alzheimer's Association (USA) recognizes this as a very effective way of helping to deal with the anxiety in both parties.

A second Caregiver Golden Rule for Dementia/Alzheimer's Clients is to always focus on feelings and not facts. This is a difficult exercise but mandatory. As an example, consider the situation where the client will not release the Caregiver responsibility to others. Often, the client has decided they do not like or desire the suggestions or proposals by family members as to how the client future should happen. How should the Caregiver respond? For most Dementia/Alzheimer's clients, conversations about where to continue living for the client often occur and the client cannot make a decision because of the many conflicting ideas that occur in the client's mind. Once again, the most paramount is "I do not want to be alone"! Family members can often suggest options but this actually confuses the demented or Alzheimer's client because it is not what the client desires. The Caregiver must be cautious to not take a position in this critical discussion ("take sides about what is best"). The client must grow in time to the best decision about where to live for the rest of life. Patience on behalf of the Caregiver and family members must occur.

Keep things simple. This third Caregiver Golden Rule for Dementia/Alzheimer's Clients is about the Caregiver answering thoughts or questions from the Dementia or Alzheimer's client with only a "yes" or "no". Long or explanatory discussions often confuse the client. Do not elaborate!

The body language and tone of voice provided by the Caregiver is critical. Tone of voice in discussions with the client is absolutely a key component to effecting a calming experience in any discussion. This fourth Caregiver Golden Rule for Dementia/Alzheimer's Clients is that the Caregiver must always look the client directly in the eye to effect belief of any discussion. Never look away from the client while speaking to them. Direct eye contact confirms sincerity and belief during any discussion.

Fifth, always be aware of client body language and tone of voice. The Caregiver responses must be calm and supportive, even while offering therapeutic fibbing comments. This is particularly important when the client demonstrates aphasia. Aphasia is a primary progressive neuro-degenerative disease which results from deterioration of brain tissue in areas important for speech and language. It involves frontotemporal lobar degeneration. Although the first symptoms of aphasia are speech and language oddities, other problems with the underlying disease, such as memory loss and personality changes can often at the same time.

The Caregiver should never argue, quiz or correct the client. This is Caregiver Golden Rule for Dementia/Alzheimer's Clients number six. Why? Arguing or correcting the client does nothing but aggravate and confuse the client. It adds to the mental confusion existing in the client's brain. The nerve tangles and amyloid synapse interferences in the client's brain cannot deliver the necessary supportive pathways within necessary brain areas to effect correct understanding.

Caregiver Golden Rule for Dementia/Alzheimer's Clients number seven involves sharing personal and physical contact. This communication technique gives anyone a sense of identity and helps maintain a current quality of life with any person...including Dementia/Alzheimer's clients. Always use the opportunity to hold the individual's hand, rub their shoulder or give the individual a hug. It provides reassurance and comfort. Even an occasional kiss from a relative or family member has immense significance. Always recall that music and dance can spark memories of happy times in a person's life.

Effecting Quality of Life and living well for the Dementia or Alzheimer's Client...and the confidant Caregiver... can be achieved through use of these Seven Caregiver Golden Rules for Serving Dementia/Alzheimer's Clients. Know the Rules!

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