



Care Partner Information

Tips for Providing Older Adult Care

Spirituality in Dementia

A diagnosis of dementia can make people feel helpless and hopeless. It is common to worry about time, money for dementia care, and what will happen in the future. For some people, being spiritual can help with these worries.

Being spiritual is about paying attention to the parts of life that are not tied to the body or material things. For some, being spiritual can help them keep their values in mind, and add meaning to their lives. Being spiritual may be part of one's religious beliefs. But, a person does not have to be religious to be spiritual.

Some studies show that spiritual beliefs can slow the changes in memory and behavior that come with dementia. This may be because being spiritual can help the person:

- Cope with changes and worries.
- Hold on to a sense of who they are.
- Keep a positive attitude.

Familiar spiritual practices, such as a song or prayer, can provide comfort at later stages of the disease, even if the person cannot speak. Other ways spirituality can provide comfort for individuals with dementia and their caregivers are listed below.

Spirituality can provide comfort

It can help bring focus to the present, and reduce worry about the future.

It can remind the person living with dementia and their caregivers of their personal values when making decisions about dementia care.

If the person or their caregiver are part of a religious or spiritual community, it can help them to stay connected with others.

This Care Partner Information page is part of a series on older adult caregiving tips. They are written to help family and community caregivers, direct care workers and community health representatives care for older adults. Available in English and Spanish at www.aging.arizona.edu

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A person's spiritual beliefs may stay the same or change when living with a serious disease. Some will become more spiritual. Others will become less spiritual. When possible, caregivers should consider the person's spiritual beliefs when providing care.

Tips for caregivers
If possible, ask questions about the person's spiritual beliefs. Write them down, and share them with anyone who provides care so these beliefs can be included in the person's care.
Talk to the person about their hopes, fears, joys, and sorrows. This can help the caregiver to know how to connect with the person.
If the person is a member of a religious or spiritual community, invite leaders from that community to visit. The person also may be able to attend services, ceremonies or other spiritual celebrations for much of the disease.
If the person's spiritual practice includes songs, prayers or other activities, include these in the person's daily schedule.

It is okay if caregivers do not know a person's spiritual beliefs. Showing care and affection can provide many of the same benefits. For example, take time when speaking with the person. Give them time to answer any questions. Be comfortable with periods of silence. It can help to speak in a warm and welcoming tone of voice. Make eye contact and hold their hand.

Remember, persons living with dementia never lose the desire to love and be loved.

Resources:

Clergy Against Alzheimer's, www.usagainstalzheimer.org; see also their book: "Seasons of Caring: Meditations for Alzheimer's and Dementia Caregivers"

American Society on Aging: Forum on Religion, Spirituality, and Aging (FORSA), www.asaging.org/forum-religion-spirituality-and-aging-forsa

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