

Monthly newsletter for people caring for those affected with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

Content & Involved

By Laura DeLoye

One myth about people with dementia or Alzheimer's is they are just a shell of the person they once were. It is true that the loved one with dementia has changed and is not the same person we knew before the disease. However, her capacity to become engaged in ways that are satisfying still persists and continues to crave connection and purpose.

"Contented Involvement," is a term discussed in the Savvy Caregiver Workshop trainings*. The phrase suggests that our goal in guiding a person with dementia should be in a "calm, safe, and pleasant" manner as much as possible. Planning for and adjusting daily activities to the ability your loved has at the moment will provide for his comfortable involvement. You will find that when a person with dementia is engaged in an enjoyable and appropriate activity for his particular stage will provide an easier flow to the day for the caregiving team and will build self-esteem.

Even as a dementia progresses, your loved one's capacity engage in a task remains, however, the level of her involvement will likely be different from her engagement prior to diagnosis. It is important to understand that your loved one needs your help in providing structure for her day. With proper structure and support, she can still:

- Zero in on a task
- Remain with the task for some time
- Have a pleasant time doing the task

This does not mean that you must keep your loved one busy doing things non-stop! Non-stop activity will overstimulate, frustrate, exhaust both of you, and it will most likely provoke anxiety. The idea is to



help to keep his emotions as steady and positive as possible. Creating and maintaining a balance in all things will achieve a more contented involvement for a person living with dementia. According to the *Savvy Caregiver Manual*, there are three anchors that affect contented involvement: the person, structure, and support.

A Guide for Contented Involvement:

Consider your loved one's interests; these may change through the course of her dementia, but it is a good place to start. Do not eliminate a task or activity just because she was previously not interested in it. Give it a try now and strive to keep sequences and procedures less complicated and demanding but not so simple that it will lead to boredom. Balancing the level of the activity to her abilities will enable her to succeed and, of course, success will decrease frustration and enhance self-esteem. Be sensitive to the changes in abilities as the dementia progresses; adapting to and supporting her changing needs and abilities is an ongoing process throughout the progression of the disease.

Adaptation to his preferences takes some creativity. Perhaps he used to enjoy working with wood and building furniture. Consider his coordination and abilities now, and adhere to safety precautions. He may no longer be able to operate electric

alzheimer's association®

California Central Coast Chapter

Santa Barbara County
1528 Chapala St., #204
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
Tel: 805.892.4259

120 E. Jones St, #113
Santa Maria, CA 93454
Tel: 805.636.6432

San Luis Obispo County
71 Zaca Ln Suite 110
San Luis Obispo, CA
93401
Tel: 805.547.3830

Ventura County
2580 E. Main St Suite 201
Ventura, CA 93003
Tel: 805.494.5200

24-Hour Helpline:
800.272.3900

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The Savvy Caregiver program is an educational program focused on providing instructional material for Alzheimer's and dementia caregivers. The program teaches the basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to handle the challenges of caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease.

The Savvy Caregiver program addresses your biggest concerns:

- ◆ Understanding Alzheimer's & other related dementias.
- ◆ The toll of caregiving
- ◆ Managing daily life & behaviors
- ◆ Caring for yourself while caring for others.
- ◆ Decision making
- ◆ Communicating with a person living with a dementia related disease.
- ◆ Taking control
- ◆ Goals for caregiving

Join our online support community, alzconnected.org. Talk to others who are facing similar challenges and know that you are not alone.

tools and machinery, but he may still be content in sanding wood by hand, feeling the smoothness of the wood. Adaptation to his changing abilities throughout the different stages of dementia is important.

Keep in mind structure. The size and complexity of a task will determine the success of contended involvement. Is the task big or small? easy or hard? multiple steps or only a few steps? Is the task abstract or concrete? Each of these attributes will need to be adjusted through each stage of dementia. Does it involve ladders, scissors, electrical equipment? Address safety issues as you go. As the disease progresses, his ability to deal with size, complexity, sequences, and movement will decline and complex tasks may not result in success.

Think about the environment: Where does the activity take place? How long will it last? Will the person be standing or sitting? Will she need to move from place to place or is everything needed to accomplish it within reach? Make sure all components of the task are accessible and within reach, set up the task in a manageable space, and allow for extra time.

Be realistic! Model the desired outcome, but don't have a fixed standard of "success." Your goal is to maintain your loved one's ability to be involved and content but this doesn't require that he be occupied for the entire day or even to have an activity every single day. Nobody's days or weeks looks like that. Give your loved one and yourself a break. Lavish abundant praise for every attempt he makes to remain engaged and pat yourself on the back for having made

this possible.

Identifying Pleasurable Activities

In attempting to find tasks or activities to engage your loved one in activities, reflect and consider:

- ◆ When was she really zeroed in on something that gave her pleasure?
- ◆ What part of the day was it when she seemed most receptive and engaged?
- ◆ At what point did you see things begin to unravel?
- ◆ What did you pull out of your bag of tricks to get her back on track?
- ◆ What was happening when it was apparent that she was really

connecting to you?

- ◆ What were the positive factors that made her smile with delight?
- ◆ What were the negative factors that you wouldn't want to repeat?

Focus on these factors to support your loved one and be prepared to adapt to his interests and abilities as they change.

The Alzheimer's Association, California Central Coast Chapter is

currently offering these workshops online throughout the year. The next workshop series beginning **Tuesday, July 7 from 10:00 am–12:00 pm** for five weeks.

To register go to: <https://bit.ly/2zCwCf2>
Or call: 1.800.272.3900

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