



FL-REACH

Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer's Caregiver Health

Think FAST!

Some of the greatest challenges of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's or other dementias are the personality and behavior changes that often occur. One type of behavior change you may notice in your loved one is that your loved one may "get stuck" on certain topics. This topic may be anxiety provoking for your loved one, or it could make your loved one angry or upset.

A common example of this is driving. When someone is no longer allowed to drive, they may talk about it frequently and focus on the issue of not being able to drive. Some people may become angry as they focus on this perceived loss of independence.

Many times, your loved one can be sidetracked or distracted from this focus onto another topic or activity that is less distressing for both you and your loved one. In order to steer your loved one onto another more pleasant topic or train of thought, you will need to be prepared and be creative.

Use the **"Think FAST"** technique. Use the following to distract your loved one:

- **Food;** Your loved one's favorite foods
- **Activity;** Something your loved one enjoys, such as looking at a magazine or old photos
- **Story;** What are your loved one's favorite topics or stories?
- **Trip;** "Let's go to the beach"...go to one of your loved one's favorite places

Prepare your action plan items in advance so that you can pull one of these distractors out of your "tool kit" when you start to see your loved one start down the path of the distressing topic. Share them with your family and friends who also care for your loved one so that they can use them as well.

- **Have at least 3 foods that your loved one enjoys** to help calm your loved one.
 - What foods does your loved one enjoy that may help calm her if upset or worried? Does she like hot tea? Does he enjoy macaroni and cheese?
 - Write down the three foods that would help to calm your loved one.
 - Have these foods on hand and any needed supplies to prepare them and be willing to make them as needed.
- **Have at least 3 short trips or activities you can take or do** that will distract your loved one.
 - What are some places that your loved one enjoys going? Does your loved one enjoy going to the park and feeding the ducks? Does she enjoy going to a favorite restaurant?
 - What are some activities that bring a smile to your loved one's face? Does he enjoy dancing? Does she enjoy playing with the dog or cat?
 - Write down three short trips or activities that you can take or do with your loved one to distract him or her from the distressing topic.
 - Be prepared to do these activities or take these trips quickly if needed. If any supplies are needed (ie bread for the ducks), make sure to keep them on hand.
- **Have at least 3 topics of conversation in mind** that you can bring up to distract your loved one from the unpleasant thought or topic.
 - What does your loved one enjoy talking about? Is he a veteran who enjoys talking about his war experiences? Is she a mom who loves telling stories about when her children were small? What topic of conversation makes his face light up?

- Write down these three topics to bring up when your loved one starts talking about the distressing topic.

Be creative in your plan; you know your loved one best. It is important to be prepared with your action plan in advance.

When your loved one begins to start down the path of the distressing topic, jumping into the distraction immediately may be obvious to your loved one. You may need to ease into distraction for it to be effective. Following are some suggestions to ease into distraction.

1. **Validate your loved one's feelings.** Your loved one may have a different perception on the situation than you do, but her feelings are real to her. "I can tell that this is really upsetting to you...we're together in this and will face this together..."
2. **Subtly and gently transition** to whichever action plan item you have chosen. "You've been through some tough times before, Dad. What was that story about the guy you rescued during the war? How about you tell me about it while we go get some ice cream."
3. **Try to continue steering the conversation toward more pleasurable topics.** You will likely have to repeat these steps often.
4. **Make sure you get regular breaks from caregiving** to allow yourself to recharge and let your guard down. It's important to take care of yourself too!

Distraction Action Plan

❖ 3 Topics of Conversation:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

❖ 3 Trips or Activities

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

❖ 3 Comforting Foods

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Remember In an Emergency Call 911