How to Support a Couple Dealing With an Alzheimer’s Diagnosis

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Alzheimer's Support: Finding Ways to Help

A diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease has an effect on many people – not only the individual who has been diagnosed but absolutely everybody who knows them. The closer the relationship with the person who is diagnosed, the more you are likely to be affected.

This is why this time is usually particularly difficult for spouses. It can be really difficult to strengthen a relationship that is already changing so much.

Couples face so many changes and challenges when one partner develops Alzheimer’s disease. Many of these couples have been together for decades. Their relationships have come through the ups and downs of life. Then one of them receives an Alzheimer’s diagnosis and the disease begins to chip away at the very foundations of their relationship.

Alzheimer’s affects each individual in different ways, so it’s impossible to make assumptions or generalizations. From start to finish, a couple’s journey in dealing with Alzheimer’s disease will be completely unique to them and ever-changing. Every couple will navigate the course of the disease — and the evolution of. partnership — in their own way.

If you are a friend or relative of a couple who is coping with memory loss, then there are things that you can do to help support them through this time.

Common Challenges Couples With Alzheimer’s Face

There are definitely issues that arise quite commonly when one partner in a relationship has Alzheimer’s. For the unaffected partner and the people supporting the couple, it’s really important to be aware of these challenges so that you can take steps to overcome them.

1. More Responsibilities for the Unaffected Partner

As the partner with Alzheimer’s becomes unable to carry out their usual tasks, the unaffected partner begins taking on their share of the workload as well as their own.

How Can You Support

It’s really important that the couple receive as much ongoing support as possible. Encourage them to access this support from wherever they are most comfortable. Family members can be leaned on, church communities are usually more than willing to help or professional help can be brought in.

The more people in place to help the couple with the practicalities of life, the more time they’ll have for each

other. Many couples find it helpful to bring professionals into their homes or to move to a supported living facility. Otherwise, there can be a tendency for the unaffected partner to become the sole nurse, housekeeper, and personal caregiver.

2. When the Caregiver's Health Begins to Decline

The additional stress and the demands of caring for a partner daily negatively affect the health of the caregiving partner.

Spend Time With the Caregiver

Talk to the caregiver. Tell them you're concerned that they're not putting their own needs first. Offer to step in and provide respite care wherever you can and ask others to do the same.

Caring for someone with Alzheimer's can be all-consuming, and many caregivers see their mental and physical health suffer as a result. Simply stopping by to spend time with the affected person once or twice a week so that the other partner can take a break will make the world of difference to them.

During this time, the caregiver could go to appointments, run errands, attend a support group or do something they enjoy. They must take care of themselves if they are going to take care of their partner.

3. Personality Changes in the Affected Person

When the affected partner begins to experience personality changes, acts unpredictably or loses confidence in their abilities due to Alzheimer's, both partners often start to withdraw from other people.

Help Them Maintain Relationships

Keep the couple engaged and involved in their social and family groups. Invite them to spend time with you and others just as you have always done before.

Maintaining your relationship will almost certainly require extra effort, but making a commitment to connect in any way you can help to provide a sense of stability at an uncertain time.

Always be there to listen and to share resources for support. Whenever you interact, try to help the couple stay positive. Some couples find that the best way to cope with an Alzheimer's diagnosis is simply to enjoy each moment.

Sharing photographs and talking about memories they've shared can be a wonderful activity for them both.

For a couple who are affected by Alzheimer's disease, small actions from family and friends can have a massive impact on their daily lives and overall outlook on life.

Really simple acts of kindness like providing respite for the caregiver or helping the couple to look on the bright side can make all the difference to them. If you know a couple that is coping with Alzheimer's, get involved and help them in any way you can.