Helping Children Understand Alzheimer’s

by AMY MANLEY

Understanding Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's affects the entire family, including the children within the family. Understanding Alzheimer's as a child can be a challenge, but there are ways you can help them to understand what’s going on with their loved one. Using the following tips will help both children and grandchildren understand what’s going on during this difficult time in their life.

Determining the Impact

The impact that Alzheimer's will have on a child depends on a variety of factors. For one, the bond the child has with the person with Alzheimer's will play a large role. The closer the child is to the Alzheimer's patient, the harder this may be on them. At a certain point, the Alzheimer's patient may not recognize the child, which is difficult for the child to understand.

Another factor that determines how much the change will impact the child is the amount of time the child spends with the Alzheimer's patient. If the child sees the patient once in a while, they may not be affected as deeply as a child that spends a lot of their time with them, or possibly even lives with them. Determining the impact is the first step to handling the situation properly.

Considering age

Once the relationship with the patient is determined, you’ll want to determine how to handle the information offered to the child. The child’s age plays the biggest role in how to present the information, as older children may be able to grasp concepts that younger children cannot. Considering the age, along with the relationship to the Alzheimer's patient, will help make the process easier. In some cases, children may be involved slightly in the care of the patient. If care giving is involved, it’s important to approach this aspect as well when explaining the situation to the child.

Discussing Alzheimer's

While you are discussing the situation with the child or children, it’s important that you explain what’s occurring with their loved one, without getting into too much detail as that can confuse the child. After you explain a bit of information, you want to leave room for questions from the child, and answer all of their questions thoroughly. The better you answer the questions the child has, the better their understanding will be, and the less upsetting the situation will be for the child.

A good way to offer information is to simply say, your grandparent has an illness, which makes things harder for them to remember things. When offering information in this manner, it’s offered in a clear and concise way that eliminates misunderstandings. It’s also important to tell the child that the problem that is occurring with their grandparent isn’t their fault. You’d be surprised how many children feel that their grandparent's issue is due to

their own doings. The last thing you want a child to experience is guilt. Even if the child doesn’t seem to be blaming themselves, offer this information to ensure they are at ease.

Conclusion

While the child may enjoy helping you with their grandparent, it’s important that the child is not given any responsibility on their own, and only takes part in care when they want to. Ensure the child continues with their own activities and having their own life to grow properly without too much responsibility.