

Additional Tips for Memory Impairments

By Donna Deos

Last month we began the discussion on some truths about memory impairments and how it is best to learn as much as you can as soon as possible.

This month I have some additional tips that should be of value to you.

1. Don't move things around on them. Their short term memory is most often what is lacking, so moving things doesn't help this. It adds to the confusion. In the big picture, this is why making the decision of where they will be off best for the long run is critical to make early on and get it right the first time. Every transition messes up the whole thing all over again.

Even moving something simple or seemingly insignificant, like something in the refrigerator, could cause them to open multiple items because it wasn't where they always keep it so they opened a new one figuring it was gone.

2. Don't get angry with them. They can't help what is happening and getting angry will only make things worse for both of you. Getting angry doesn't change the reality of the situation, it just makes you both feel worse.

3. What used to work and be fine is not how things will work now... and it could be different each and every day. You are going to need to learn to become very flexible. You will need to tuck and roll with just about everything.

4. If they get uncomfortable going out to unfamiliar places – or ones that used to be familiar but now make them uncomfortable, do not make them go. Their world is shrinking and life gets more and more overwhelming for them. Instead, find someone to stay home with them so you can go out.

You need to adjust you, because



trying to force them to do what they used to do simply won't go well.

5. Introduce other potential helpers and caregivers early. You are going to need more and more help as time progresses. They need to have these people in their long term memory for things to go more smoothly down the road. What I mean by this is enlist family or even in-home care givers for a short period of time weekly early on so as your need to have people coming in to help increases they are not unfamiliar with the concept of potential strangers in their house helping them.

6. Always be kind. I know it can be very frustrating, but what you say and do – or more so – how you made them feel when you said or did it, will eventually reach their long term memory. You may be thinking they have no idea who you are so it doesn't matter as they will not remember that you got really frustrated and became mean, but trust me, they will register it eventually.

Some wise person once said words to the effect of, "They may not remember exactly what you said or did, but they always remember how you made them feel." This is so true.

7. Sometimes you have to tell "fiblets". As they get stressed, confused, frustrated, or just repetitive to the point where they are driving

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you nuts, it is okay to find harmless ways to redirect them. Here's an example: for a person who is waiting for their mother to pick them up and continually asks you where she is, it is okay to tell them "she'll be here soon" and then find a way to redirect them to something else. Even if they are 85 and their mother has long been deceased, that is an okay thing to tell them in a nice way. It certainly beats the trauma you can bestow upon them if you do tell them the current day truth about their mother being gone.

Remember, most of the time they aren't mentally in the current day. Roll with that and life will be easier.

8. They will likely recognize you as somebody else and then talk about the real you to that person. For example, a friend of mine was taking his Dad for a drive and went past his old Prep School on the drive. His Dad got excited and started talking proudly about how his son went there, which was nice overall. However, saying it to that son and not recognizing him as his son was heartbreaking for my friend.

Be prepared for this to happen at some point. It is painful, but it is a very real situation that has happened to many.

9. There are good days and there are bad ones. Some days they may

know you, some days they won't. Some days they will make you feel awful for never coming to see them (even though you visit frequently). Some days they will beg you to take them home with you. Frequently at the CCRC I worked at the nurses would tell the families it was okay to leave and not feel bad. When the families are not there the person is just fine. This is very true as well. I have walked through the Memory Care unit many times and found it very peaceful and the residents calm and happy.

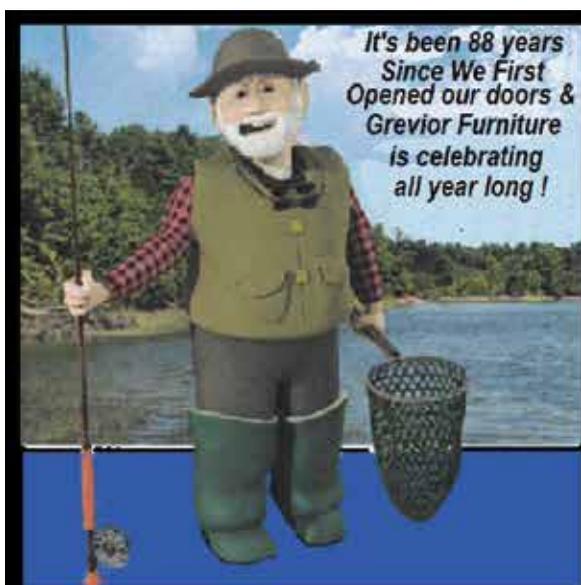
Our biggest fear is that they are crying and miserable the whole time we are gone. Rest assured in knowing that is not the case.

10. You are going to need time away and your own outlets to process your stress, frustration and heartache. Support groups are a wonderful thing. There are many around. Friends and hobbies are great therapy too. Start thinking now and establishing those routines. You will need them. Time away is always a necessity.

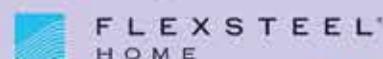
11. My final point is you don't have to do this all alone. There are so very many resources out there. Find them and use them!

With Love & Blessings,

Donna



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