HARMONY STREET KIDS

from the Sometimes Grandma… books

YOUTH & FAMILY GUIDE

10 Things Kids and Families Should Know When Someone They Love Has Dementia

Five things for kids. Five things for the grown-ups who love them.

For children ages 4 to 10 and their families

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Clinically reviewed by two practicing physicians

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A child-centered companion to WAM's *10 Things Every Family Should Do on Receiving a Diagnosis of Dementia*, built from national guidance for children and families.

This guide offers education and support. It has been clinically reviewed by two practicing physicians, and it does not replace medical advice. Talk with a qualified healthcare professional about your family's specific needs.

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FOR KIDS

Ask, feel, connect

When someone in the family is diagnosed with dementia, the children in the home feel it too. They notice changes before anyone explains them, and they often carry questions and feelings they don't know how to say out loud. This guide gives children honest words and simple ways to cope, and gives the grown-ups who love them a roadmap for the conversations ahead.

Grown-ups, read the kids' section together.

1 Ask anything.

Dementia is a sickness in the brain. It can make it hard for someone to remember things, find the right words, or know what day it is. It can change the way they act, too.

You might have lots of questions. That's good! Ask a grown-up you trust. They will tell you the truth, even when the answer is "I don't know yet."

2 It's not your fault, and you can't catch it.

Nothing you did, said, or thought made this happen. Dementia is not like a cold. You can't catch it from a hug, a kiss, or sitting close.

Fixing it is not your job. The grown-ups and doctors will take care of the big stuff.

3 All your feelings are okay.

You might feel sad, mad, scared, confused, or embarrassed. You might feel a little jealous when the grown-ups are busy helping. You might feel happy and silly, too. Every feeling is okay.

Let your feelings out. Draw them, write them, sing them, or talk about them. When feelings get really big, take three slow belly breaths.

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FOR KIDS

Love and happy moments

4

Love doesn't forget.

Someone with dementia might forget your name or call you by someone else's name. That can hurt. It doesn't mean they stopped loving you. Their brain is having a hard time finding the name.

You can smile and say, "Hi, Grandma. It's me, Jaiya!" Even when memories fade, the happy feelings from your time together can stay.

5

Keep making happy moments.

You can still have fun together. Listen to music, look at photos, read a book, draw, or set the table together. Talk slowly, ask one question at a time, and ask before you give a hug.

You are not alone. Lots of kids have someone they love with dementia, and there are grown-ups ready to help you.



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FOR GROWN-UPS

Honest conversations

6

Start early, and tell the truth.

Children notice changes long before anyone explains them, and silence leaves them to fill in the gaps on their own. Tell them what is happening in short, plain words suited to their age, and name the disease. Avoid softened phrases that can confuse young children. It's fine to say you don't know.

If the person living with dementia is willing and still able, consider having the conversation together, so the child hears from them directly. Plan to come back to it as the child grows and the disease changes.

7

Listen for the worry behind the question.

"Will I get it?" often means "Am I safe?" "Is it because I was bad?" often means the child is carrying blame. Answer the fear directly: dementia isn't contagious, it isn't anyone's fault, and having someone in the family with dementia does not mean they or you will get it.

Children also worry about what changes for them. Tell them who will be there for school pickups, meals and bedtime. The Questions Children Ask pages that follow offer kid-sized answers to the questions children ask most.

8

Make room for feelings, and keep life steady.

Set aside regular one-on-one time. Let children express feelings in their own way, through play, art, journaling, music or talking, and tell them every feeling is normal, including laughter and joy. Keep daily routines as steady as you can.

Children learn by watching. Share your own feelings and what helps you cope. Let your child's teacher or school counselor know what is happening at home.

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FOR GROWN-UPS

Childhood and support

9

Let them help, and let them be kids.

Small, age-right ways to help, like choosing music, looking at photos together or setting the table, can ease a child's sense of helplessness and build empathy. Hands-on care, supervision and adult worries belong to adults.

Many children quietly take on more than the grown-ups realize. If your child is helping with care regularly, tell their pediatrician and their school, so they get support and stay on track.

10

Watch for signs, and get support for them and for you.

A child may be struggling if they pull away from the person, lose patience with them, complain of stomachaches or headaches, slip in school, spend more time away from home, stop inviting friends over, or argue more. If these signs last or get worse, or a child talks about hurting themselves, reach out to their pediatrician, school counselor or a mental health professional.

Children's grief and support programs can help, and families with a parent living with younger-onset dementia can find community through Lorenzo's House. Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline at **800-272-3900** or the Alzheimer's Foundation of America Helpline at **866-232-8484**. Taking care of yourself is part of taking care of them.

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SPEAKING POINTS

Questions children ask

Honest, kid-sized answers. Adjust the names and details to fit your family.

What is dementia?

It's a sickness in Grandma's brain. It makes it hard for her to remember things, find her words, and sometimes know what day it is. It can change how she acts, too.

GROUNDED IN Alzheimer's Association; AFA

Can I catch it?

No. Dementia isn't like a cold. You can't catch it from hugs, kisses or being close.

GROUNDED IN Alzheimer's Association

Did I make this happen?

No. Nothing you did, said or thought caused this. It isn't anyone's fault.

GROUNDED IN Sesame Workshop; NACG; AFA

Will I get it? Will you?

Most people who get dementia are much older. Having someone in our family with it doesn't mean you or I will get it. Doctors keep learning more about keeping brains healthy.

GROUNDED IN Alzheimer's Association

Why did Grandma call me by Mom's name?

Her brain is mixing up names. You might remind her of Mom when Mom was little. It doesn't mean she loves you any less.

GROUNDED IN Alzheimer's Association

Why does she ask the same thing again and again?

Her brain has trouble holding on to new things. You can answer again, nice and calm. She isn't trying to be silly.

GROUNDED IN Alzheimer's Association

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SPEAKING POINTS · CONTINUED

Questions children ask

Will Grandma get better?

There isn't a cure yet, and doctors are working hard to find one. She will have good days and hard days.

GROUNDED IN Alzheimer's Association

Will Grandma forget me?

She might forget your name someday. She can still feel your love, and the happy feelings you share can stay with her.

GROUNDED IN Alzheimer's Association; AFA

Is Grandma going to die?

Dementia is a serious sickness that gets worse over time. Nobody knows exactly what will happen or when. We will always tell you the truth, and you can always ask me.

GROUNDED IN Alzheimer's Association; NACG

Who will take care of me?

I will, and so will [names]. Here's who picks you up, makes dinner and tucks you in.

GROUNDED IN Sesame Workshop

What can I do to help?

Just being with her and being kind helps a lot. We can play her favorite music, look at pictures or set the table together.

GROUNDED IN Alzheimer's Association

Is it okay to have fun?

Yes. Laughing and having fun is good for you and for Grandma.

GROUNDED IN Sesame Workshop

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GROUNDED IN NATIONAL GUIDANCE

What the national sources say

These summaries are in our own words. The references at the end list where each one comes from.

Sesame Street in Communities (Sesame Workshop)

What it offers. Free videos, storybooks, games and printable activities for providers serving young children, mostly ages 1 to 6. Its resources now live on sesameworkshop.org.

Guidance we draw from. Be honest and listen. You don't need every answer right away. Look for the fear behind a child's question, such as worry about their own safety. Tell young children clearly that they did not cause what happened. Reassure them about who will keep caring for them. Let them know it's okay to feel happy. Use comfort, touch and simple calming activities, and remember that caring adults are what help children most.

What it doesn't have. We found no Sesame topic dedicated to dementia or memory loss. Its guidance comes from its grief, difficult questions, calming and hard-experiences resources, which transfer well to our audience.

Alzheimer's Association

What it offers. Guidance for parents and teachers, kid and teen resource pages, an activity list for families, and a 24/7 Helpline at 800-272-3900 in more than 200 languages.

Guidance we draw from. Answer questions honestly in words a child understands. Children may feel sad, confused, scared, angry, guilty, jealous or embarrassed, and may worry that dementia is contagious or that their parents will get it. Signs of hidden struggle include withdrawal, physical complaints, slipping grades, staying away from home, not inviting friends over and more arguing. Help children cope with regular time together, outlets like journaling, reassurance that their feelings are normal, learning together and a way to take part in care. Its suggested answers cover what dementia is, whether it is contagious (it isn't), why a grandparent uses the wrong name (don't correct them), repeated questions, whether the person will get better and whether they will forget the child (they can still feel the child's love).

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GROUNDED IN NATIONAL GUIDANCE · CONTINUED

What the national sources say

Alzheimer's Foundation of America (AFA)

What it offers. Guidance from Jennifer Reader, LCSW, AFA's director of educational and social services; the children's books *Dancing with Granddad* and *Gardening with Grandma* (ages 5 to 8); and a Helpline at 866-232-8484 staffed by licensed social workers.

Guidance we draw from. Start talking as early as you can, in a calm setting with dedicated time. If the person with Alzheimer's is willing and able, include them, which works best in early stages and should never be forced. Explain that the illness affects memory and speech, that the person still cares, that the changes aren't about the child and that it is no one's fault. Coach children to reintroduce themselves, speak slowly, ask one question at a time, use gentle touch and always ask before hugging. Reassure them that happy feelings can stay even when memories fade.

American Association of Caregiving Youth (AACY)

What it offers. National advocacy for caregiving youth, children under 18 who give significant help to a family or household member who is ill, frail or needs daily help. AACY counts more than 5.4 million caregiving youth in the U.S. Its Caregiving Youth Project in Palm Beach County provides direct services, and its Caregiving Youth Institute leads national research and advocacy.

Guidance we draw from. Caregiving is often hidden, and schools rarely identify the children doing it. Signs include missed health visits, poor attendance, falling grades, anger or sadness, isolation and behavior that can look like ADHD. Pediatricians are encouraged to ask whether a child helps care for someone at home. With support, helping can build purpose and empathy. Without it, children risk stress, health problems and falling behind in school.

What it doesn't have. AACY's public materials focus on recognition, schools and policy rather than a family tip sheet. Our points 9 and 10 carry its message to parents.

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GROUNDED IN NATIONAL GUIDANCE · CONTINUED

What the national sources say

Lorenzo's House

What it offers. A global virtual community for sons, daughters and families living with younger-onset dementia, founded by Diana Cose. Its EmpowermentPLUS model includes age-appropriate virtual Youth Clubs for ages 4 to 18 and older, an annual global Youth Summit, care partner clubs and outreach to end stigma. It also runs an in-person Music, Movement and Community program in Chicago.

Guidance we draw from. Children whose parent has younger-onset dementia are often left out of traditional dementia support and can feel isolated and misunderstood. Peer connection, youth voice and responses to stigma are central to its work.

What it doesn't have. We found no public tip sheet for talking with children. Its value to our guide is as a referral for families where a parent, not a grandparent, is living with dementia.

National Alliance for Children's Grief (NACG)

What it offers. Tip sheets for caregivers, educator guides, a holiday toolkit in English and Spanish, and a national directory of children's grief centers and camps at nacg.org/find-support.

Guidance we draw from. Be honest. Use plain, concrete words and avoid euphemisms young children may take literally. Keep explanations short, let the child's questions set the pace, and come back to the conversation over time. Reassure children it was no one's fault. Children express grief in many ways, including art, play, music and writing, and some won't talk about it at all. Listen without rushing to fix, model healthy coping, keep checking in, and seek professional help if changes in sleep, mood, behavior or school last or worsen, or if a child talks about harming themselves.

What it doesn't have. NACG's public guidance centers on grief after a death. We apply its principles to the ongoing losses of dementia. Children's Grief Awareness Day is observed on the third Thursday of November, which falls on November 19 in 2026.

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HOW THE GUIDE IS BUILT

Source map

Which national sources support each of the ten points.

POINT	SESAME	ALZ ASSN	AFA	AACY	LORENZO'S	NACG
1. Ask anything	●	●	●			●
2. Not your fault, can't catch it	●	●	●			●
3. All feelings are okay	●	●	●			●
4. Love doesn't forget		●	●			
5. Keep making happy moments	●	●	●		●	●
6. Start early, tell the truth	●	●	●			●
7. The worry behind the question	●	●				
8. Feelings and steady routines	●	●		●		●
9. Let them help, let them be kids		●		●		
10. Watch for signs, get support		●	●	●	●	●

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About this guide

Version 1.0 · October 2026. Clinically reviewed by two practicing physicians.

This is a living guide. We will keep updating it as resources and the conversations around Alzheimer's and other dementias evolve.

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