



# Alzheimer's Awareness Family Night

## HANDOUTS AND RESOURCES

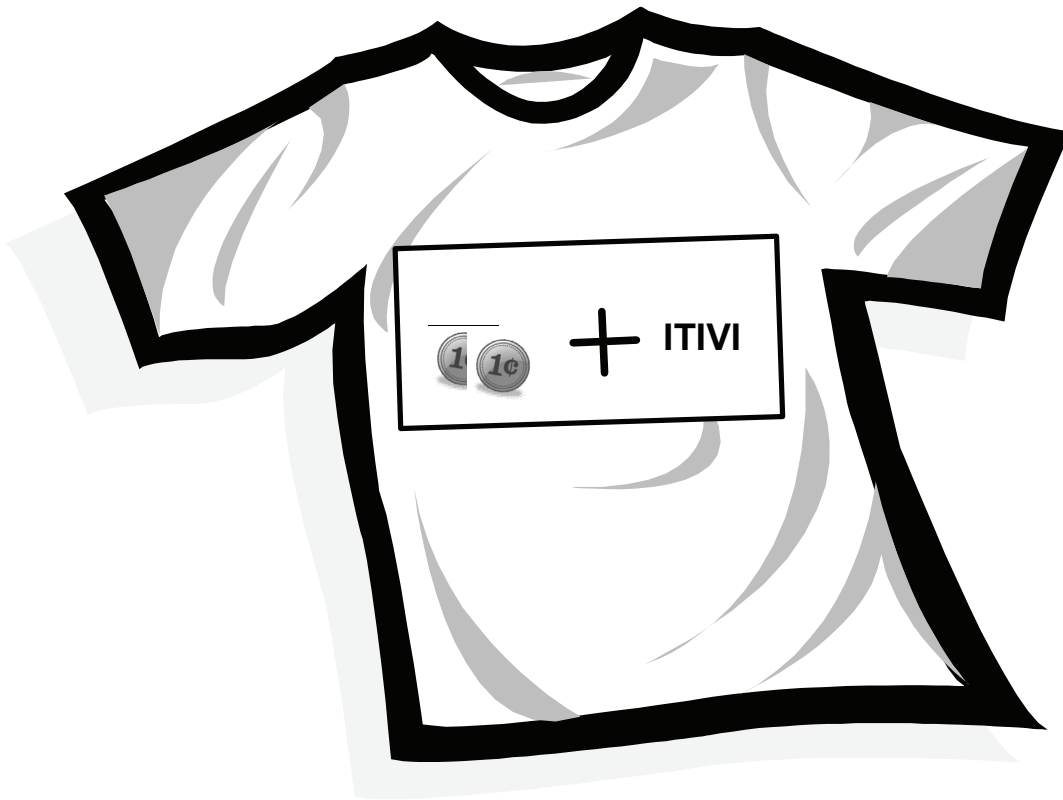
### **SESSION #6:**

### **Pain and Depression in AD and Caregiver Self-Care**



## Handout #1: Opening Exercise

What does this say?





## Handout #2: No-Pressure Quiz

- 1. One premise of this issue is that pain, depression, and dementia are intertwined, meaning that their symptoms overlap. Which of the following are possible symptoms of all three conditions?**
  - a. An inability to concentrate
  - b. Change in appetite and sleep patterns, restlessness
  - c. Withdrawal from activities and lack of energy
  - d. All of the above
  - e. B and C only
  
- 2. The cause of depression can be a sad event, such as the loss of a spouse, but it might also be a side effect of certain medications.**
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
- 3. People with Alzheimer's disease who cannot express their pain in words usually give us many non-verbal clues that they are uncomfortable, such as:**
  - a. Labored breathing, groaning, distressed facial expressions
  - b. Wringing hands, irritability, fidgeting, pacing
  - c. A fake smile or a calm, blank expression
  - d. All of the above
  - e. A and B only
  
- 4. Treating pain is important, not only because it's the kind thing to do, but because it can prevent other physiological symptoms including all of the following EXCEPT:**
  - a. Delayed healing
  - b. Hyperactive immune system
  - c. Increased heart rate
  - d. Lowered appetite that can lead to nutritional deficiencies
  - e. Sleep deprivation

**5. Medications for treating pain, depression, and dementia are available, but people with these conditions can also be eased by kindness and distraction. Which of the following is NOT an example of these methods?**

- a. Providing a quiet, calm environment, such as rocking on an outdoor porch
- b. Giving the person a hug or a gentle hand massage with scented lotion
- c. Singing old, familiar songs together
- d. Putting the person in the middle of a class of a dozen running, bouncing, vocal pre-schoolers
- e. Laughing together at a humorous video, such as an old "I Love Lucy" show

## Handout #3: Important Points and Resources

### A summary of the discussion

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Dementia, depression, and pain are like three strands of a braided rope. When they are woven together, it's hard to distinguish one from another.

- Both physical and emotional pain are common as people age.
- Depression can result from prolonged physical or emotional pain or from the reality of facing a difficult condition such as dementia.

Clinical depression requiring professional help is a concern if you or someone you love has several of the following symptoms, and they are both pervasive throughout each day and last longer than two weeks:

- Change in appetite and accompanying weight loss or gain
- Change in sleeping patterns; sleeping either too much or too little; having fitful, restless sleep; feeling constantly tired
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and/or guilt
- Inability to concentrate accompanied by indecisiveness
- Physical symptoms without other obvious causes, such as stomach aches or headaches

The most serious sign of depression is thoughts of suicide. A person who expresses suicidal thoughts, should *always* be taken seriously and given immediate professional attention.

Depression can often be alleviated by some combination of anti-depressants, counseling, and lifestyle changes, such as improved eating habits, regular exercise, exposure to the outdoors, pleasant social time spent with others, or a project that helps them feel valued.

Depression may also be a side effect of certain medications.

Dementia has many symptoms in common with depression. The inactivity that often results from dementia can also increase physical pains. Pain, depression, and dementia all can and should be treated.

### **Assessing Pain and Discomfort**

Both doctors and patients often see pain as a natural side effect of aging, but pain can and should be treated. This poses a problem for people with dementia, who, as their disease progresses, often find it difficult to express their discomfort in words, but may act it out through anxious or agitated behavior. Studies show that pain is grossly under-treated in people with dementia.

Common signs of pain include:

- Noisy breathing – labored, loud, gasping, or rapid, for example
- Distressed vocalizations – moaning, groaning, muttering, repeating words in a mournful tone; the commonly uttered “help me” is often an expression of physical pain, emotional pain, or both
- Facial expressions – clenched jaws, distorted and distressed expressions, tightly closed eyes or dilated, glazed eyes, frowning, pleading looks
- Body position/language – clenched fists, wringing hands, rocking, fetal position, hunched shoulders, self-protective gestures such as an arm in front of one’s stomach
- Fidgeting – restlessness, impatience, altered gait or posture, forceful rubbing of a body part such as a sore arm
- Pacing – this is sometimes an effort to escape the pain – to literally walk away from it
- Uncharacteristic anxiety, irritability, or aggression – crabbiness, hostility, striking out
- Change in daily activities, habits – difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, decreased ability to concentrate, withdrawal from activities; many of these are also signs of depression.

People with a painful condition such as osteoporosis *before* their dementia arose, *continue* to need treatment for that condition. Moreover, as people age, they are likely to have additional aches and pains in bones and joints that need treatment.

### **More reasons to provide relief**

Whenever it is in our power to do so, most of us would choose to relieve the physical or emotional pain of others out of simple human kindness. Here are additional reasons for offering relief. Untreated pain:

- Increases stress
- Inhibits the immune system and delays healing
- Interferes with sleep
- Tends to reduce appetites and lower chances for adequate nutritional intake
- Compromises mobility and puts people at increased risk for falls
- Can raise heart rates and blood pressure and exacerbate other medical conditions
- Is a primary contributor to depression



Relieving pain or discomfort automatically improves a person's quality of life.

### **Caregiver tips for relieving your own pain and others'**

With new and more effective drugs constantly being tested, we are fortunate to live in a time when there are medicines to treat pain, depression, and the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. We are also fortunate to have many non-medicinal means of providing comfort. For example:

- Changing the environment – Leaving noise and the confusion of crowds behind
- Changing a person's body position – Stretching; fluffing pillows, elevating feet
- Changing the temperature – Adding a sweater or a fan
- Providing tasty food, a relaxing atmosphere, and pleasant company at mealtime
- Providing distraction – Including soft music, colorful kites, singing birds, an affectionate cat or dog to pet, or an engaging game
- Providing purpose – People always appreciate opportunities to help others
- Increasing a person's sense of being valued – Offering a hug, the loving touch of a hand or foot massage, or kind words
- Helping a person to relax – Deep breathing, singing, laughter, and a walk outdoors are among the best means.

## A resource list

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Type “dementia and pain,” or “dementia and depression” on the search line of your Internet browser, and you will get thousands of entries. You can also go to well-known sites on Alzheimer’s disease and search these topics within the sites. Here is a sampling of sites where reputable information can be found:

- [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)
- <http://www.alzheimers.org.uk>
- <http://www.alzfdn.org>
- <http://www.lumetra.com> (Assessing pain)
- [www.masspro.org](http://www.masspro.org) (look for their “Fast Facts”)
- <http://healthlink.mcw.edu/article/967581724.html>
- [www.healthinaging.org](http://www.healthinaging.org)
- <http://www.healthyplace.com>

In addition, *Alzheimer’s Basic Caregiving – an ABC Guide* by Kathy Laurenhue ([www.wisernow.com](http://www.wisernow.com)) also has a useful chapter on this topic.

The book quoted in the Caregiver Self-Care portion of this session was *I’d Rather Laugh, How to Be Happy Even When Life Has Other Plans for You*, by Linda Richman (New York: Warner Books, 2001).



