

How to Assist Children in Making Memory Aids

Set aside a period of time when you can be assured of minimal interruptions.

1. Explain to the child that you want to discuss the challenges the family is experiencing in caring for a relative with memory impairment. Ask the child to help you identify instances when he or she has observed that the relative has changed. Ask the child to share with you how the changes make him or her feel about the relative.
2. Explain the disease that is causing the relative's memory loss, using terminology appropriate to the child's level of comprehension. Reading together one of the books referenced at the end of this chapter is an excellent way to share information about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.
3. Reassure the child that he or she is in no way responsible for the relative's challenging behaviors and that any negative/aggressive behaviors toward the child or other family members are related to the disease and are not intentional.
4. Ask the child to tell you activities that he or she used to enjoy doing with the relative. Discuss why the relative may no longer be able to participate in those activities as he or she used to.
5. Ask the child to help you think of activities that he or she could do together with the relative that would be enjoyable and helpful. Write them down for future reference. Before visiting the relative, have the child pick one or two of the activities to do with the relative during the visit. Be sure to review with the child what he or she intends to do and then later ask the child to tell you about the outcome.
6. Suggest to the child that because the relative is forgetting so many important facts it would be helpful, and fun, to make a book of memories for the relative that they could talk about together.
7. Read the Reproducible Memory Booklet for Children to Make with the child, pointing out that once completed the relative will be able to read the sentences and look at the pictures to remind him or her of people and events that he or she is having trouble remembering.

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8. Gather supplies that the child will need to use for this activity, including scissors, glue stick, pencil with eraser, crayons, a three-ring folder or binder, and photographs.
9. Assist the child in reviewing family albums to gather photographs to paste onto the appropriate pages. It is best to find pictures that show only one person; if necessary, photos that show two or more people should be clearly labeled with their names. If photos are unavailable, encourage the child to draw a picture depicting the person or an event/occasion in the space provided.
10. Once appropriate pictures are collected, explain to the child that he or she can show the booklet to the relative and say, "Grandpa, I'd like us to make a book about your memories so that we can talk about them. I have pictures of all of our family and about your life to paste in the book. Will you help me to fill in the sentences so we can read it together later? You tell me how to finish these sentences and I'll write the words in for you."
11. Be prepared to monitor the activity initially. You may need to suggest that the child and the relative only complete one page, or two, per session. Encourage the child to end the activity by saying, "Thanks so much, Grandpa, for helping me to make this memory book. Let's do some more of it tomorrow." The relative may not want to part with the booklet, in which case suggest to the child that he or she can let Grandpa look at the book until he is distracted by another activity and puts it down voluntarily. Then the child can retrieve it and put it in a safe place until the next session.
12. Once the booklet is completed, the child can say, "Grandpa, this book tells us all about you, your life, and your family. You can look at it whenever you want to remember these happy memories. Let's look at it together now. Please tell me all about these pictures."
13. Instruct the child to listen patiently to what the relative has to say about each picture. The relative may say the same things about the pictures

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each time they talk about them; reassure the child that this is good practice for the relative. The child can feel like he or she is helping the relative to rehearse the information that is difficult to remember.

14. Have the child point out to the relative details in the picture. For example, if they are looking at the grandparents' wedding picture, the child could say, "Look at the beautiful wedding dress Grandma was wearing" or "You wore a bowtie at your wedding, Grandpa." This may serve to prompt the relative to talk more about the picture/event.

The relative may talk inaccurately about the pictures. The child should not argue with him. Instead the child can suggest that they turn the page and look at the next picture. The child can also suggest that they read the sentences together. For instance, if the relative points at a picture of his wife and says, "That's my mother," the child can point to the sentence and say, "Look, Grandpa, it says here, 'My wife's name is Mary Lou.'"