

Agree, Apologize, Distract

One of the most frustrating things for caregivers to come to grips with, is accepting your loved one's changing reality. With memory loss, added confusion, and lack of problem-solving abilities, their perception of the world is changing. This means that your loved one may:

- Make false accusations – “You stole my purse,” “You just want to put me in a home,” “You are having an affair with that woman.”
- Tell stories that are untrue – “You never come and see me,” “I am still working” (retired for 20 years), a variety of made up stories, etc.
- Saying they've completed tasks they in fact have not done – “I have already taken my shower,” “I did take my medications – those aren't my pills,” or, “You did not feed me breakfast.”
- Misinterpret what they are seeing/hearing – the person thinks that what they are seeing on TV is really happening around them; hears a noise and says, “Someone is trying to break into the house,” no longer remembers their home, “This is not my house – I want to go home!”
- Pick up on negative body language and think it is targeted at them – “What did I do to you?” Grandchildren playing and making noise, the person responds, “Those kids are brats!”

Our logical response in each of these situations is to help them understand reality. We do this by trying to explain, reason and even coerce the person. Yet all of this tactics will only end up in an argument that you WILL NOT WIN. Instead, a new strategy will be needed: Agree, Apologize, and Distract/Defer. Here are some examples for each of the situations listed above:

Person Living with Dementia (PLWD): “You stole my purse!”

You: “Oh dear, your purse is missing” (AGREE), “I am so sorry” (APOLOGIZE), “Let's see if we can find it after we finish eating lunch (DEFER)

PLWD: “You never come and see me.”

You: “I know it feels like a long time since we've seen each other,” (AGREE), “I'm sorry – I've missed you too! (APOLOGIZE), “Did I show you the latest picture of...” (DISTRACT)

PLWD: “I've already taken my shower.”

You: “I bet you showered earlier, (AGREE), “I didn't mean to hurt your feelings,” (APOLOGIZE), “I love when you wear that pretty pink blouse – let's put it on for lunch today” (as you escort her to the bathroom and try to get her cleaned up (DISTRACT)

PLWD: “This is not my house. I want to go home!”

You: “This place doesn't seem like home,” (AGREE) “I'm sorry you seem so scared,” (APOLOGIZE), “Let's sit down and have a bowl of ice cream. I want to know more about your home.” (DISTRACT)

PLWD: “What is your problem? I didn't start a fight with you!”

You: “I know you think I'm angry,” (AGREE) “I am sorry that I am having a bad day,” (APOLOGIZE), I think our favorite show is on TV right now.” (DISTRACT)

While you may think this is a ridiculous strategy, arguing with your loved one will be more ridiculous and frustrating for you in the end. Practice this technique whenever you can. In time, it will become second nature to you, and you will find that you are making life better for both of you!