

## Memory Care: A Proposed Definition

Memory Care is an action by a caregiver that fills in or “makes up for” memory gaps in order for a person to be able to do tasks and activities, and also to experience a meaningful and enjoyable life. What these actions (or “interventions”) are depends upon the individual’s cognitive deficits, level of impairment, complexity of the task, and on past and current capabilities and interests. Examples:

- reminding a person to take their medications or that it is time for lunch,
- modeling how to brush one’s hair using a hairbrush,
- laying out clothes in the order to put them on,
- removing clutter that can cause confusion,
- setting up tools or utensils that one used to use and enjoy (e.g. car or farming equipment, cooking utensils),
- placing signs on doors and drawers to identify what it is for or contents
- assisting with washing, household chores or shopping.

If the memory loss is a result of dementia, which entails progressive decline vs. stroke or traumatic brain injury, interventions change and increase as the disease and memory loss advance. An example may be that at an early stage a caregiver sets up a meal and from there the individual can feed herself, and with advancing dementia may need to place food bites on a spoon and model putting the spoon into one’s mouth, and even later, the caregiver may need to hold the spoon herself and place the food into the individual’s mouth.

In addition, Memory Care involves recognizing and identifying causes (possibly fear or confusion because the individual no longer recognizes people, surroundings or language) of distressed behaviors (such as agitation or hitting), and providing interventions that alleviate and prevent such behaviors. Examples of these interventions include reassurance, diversion, removal of visual and sound clutter, addition of familiar music, and meaningful activity. Caregivers are able to problem-solve and identify probable interventions by observing the individual and having knowledge of their characteristics and interests, as well as communicating and collaborating with other caregivers and medical and social support professionals.

In addition, resources for providers of such a service are:

1. The dementia competencies guide for direct care workers, "Knowledge and Skills Needed for Dementia Care: A Guide for Direct Care Workers in Everyday Language"
2. "Caring Sheets" - describing specific aspects of tasks to assist a person with dementia. (Listed under Resources at website)

Both are available to download at [www.dementiacoalition.org](http://www.dementiacoalition.org).

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12/7/11