

Providing the Right Amount of Support

Each person living with dementia is unique, with different strengths and abilities. Dementia also affects people in different ways. Each person's level of independence will vary and change over time. As a caregiver, you can help the person stay as independent as possible by providing just the right amount of support.

Read Clara's story below. You will notice how Clara's daughter, Emily, helped her stay independent by offering just the right amount of support.

Clara is 82 years old and living with Alzheimer's disease. She worked in a department store for many years and was always good at putting together beautiful outfits. She now lives with her daughter, Emily, where she has her own room with a closet for her clothes and accessories. Each morning after breakfast, Clara goes to her room, picks out matching clothes to wear and comes downstairs fully dressed.

One morning, Emily notices that Clara has been in her room longer than usual. When Emily checks on her, she sees that Clara is having trouble buttoning her shirt and her clothes don't match. Emily doesn't say anything about Clara's outfit choice. She buttons Clara's shirt up for her without asking if Clara needs help. Clara becomes angry.

The next day after breakfast, Emily asks Clara if she can see her beautiful clothes. As they walk to Clara's room together, Emily asks Clara about her work at the department store. She tells Clara how much she likes her clothes and asks her what color she would like to wear that day. Clara tells her she would like to wear pink. Emily then asks if she could help Clara find pink clothes to wear and Clara agrees. Emily shows Clara two pink blouses without buttons and two pairs of pants for Clara to choose from. Then, Emily goes back to the kitchen so Clara can get dressed. After a few minutes, Clara comes downstairs fully dressed and in matching clothes.

How Emily supported Clara's independence

» **Focus on the things the person living with dementia CAN do instead of what they CAN'T.**

Clara was having trouble matching clothes and buttoning her shirt. But Emily knows that matching clothes have always been important to Clara, and saw that Clara got frustrated when she tried to help her button her shirt. So the next day, Emily focused on the fact that Clara could still decide what she wanted to wear when given two choices, and could still dress herself if she wears clothing without buttons.

» **Do tasks WITH the person instead of FOR the person.**

Emily doesn't decide what clothes Clara should wear. Instead, she shows her two blouses and pairs of pants to choose from.

» **Connect with the person instead of correcting them.**

Emily never mentions to Clara that her clothes don't match. Instead, Emily connects with Clara by asking her questions about her job at the department store while she helps Clara decide what clothes she would like to wear.

Think about the person you are caring for and how you can encourage their independence. How can you adjust your approach by providing just the right amount of support?

What is one activity the person living with dementia needs assistance with? This could be a daily task, like taking a bath, or it could be an activity you know the person enjoys, such as working in the garden.

Which part or parts of the task can the person do by themselves? Which parts will they need help with?

What are some ways in which you could offer “the right amount of support” to help them complete the activity?

Tips for providing the right amount of support

- » **Know the person.** It is essential to learn as much as you can about the person you care for. Find out their likes, dislikes, strengths and abilities.
- » **Ask about their preferences.** Talk about which things they would like help with, and which things they would like to do on their own. Have a conversation about different situations and how they'd like you to help.
- » **Modify tasks.** Make adjustments to allow for success. The person might need help starting a task. Or, they may need you to help simplify the steps they should take to complete a task. They may want verbal cues or reminders. For example, say “here is your sweater” while handing the sweater to the person, or remind them it is time to take their pills. Find out what type of help will make them feel most successful.
- » **Start out small.** Begin with a small amount of support and see how things go. What works today may not work tomorrow. Don't be afraid to try something new, as long as it's supportive. If it doesn't work, try something else.
- » **Organize the environment.** For example, think about the person's best times of day and schedule the most important activities during those times.
- » **Evaluate and adjust.** Watch for signs that you are providing too little or too much support. It is important to continue to evaluate and adjust your approach as the disease progresses and the person's interests and abilities change.
- » **Contact the Alzheimer's Association®.** If you have questions or need additional guidance on supporting the person's independence, call the Association's 24/7 Helpline **(800.272.3900)**.