

## The Part Emotion Plays in Dementia Care

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People think dementia is only about memory, but it also affects a person's ability to reason, to perform tasks, to initiate and carry out a plan, and to understand and express ideas. This dilemma causes confusion, frustration, and feeling left out of life and relationship with people they care about. I've spoken to people with dementia and they are grieving the loss of their ability to give and receive clear messages. When they listen to the dementia coach instructing their family members in strategies that give clarity back, they often say things like, "You listen to her. She knows what I'm experiencing." They may even point out the ways the family members hinder their feeling good about themselves.

To feel confused and left out is not only very uncomfortable, it is tiring, frustrating and often angering. **Doing** something is often the only way the person can express this discomfort. We need to realize that **all behavior means something**. It is saying "I feel:", "I want", "I need". Care partners can ease this discomfort by learning to speak to them and work with them in light of the cognitive changes that are taking place: the inability to 'hold onto' information, slow processing of information, little to no storage of new information, and slowed retrieval of information. By learning 'to speak Alzheimer's' we can continue meaningful relationship with the person with dementia.

This article was originally a column of Beverly's called Matters of the Mind in the South Shore Senior News in November of 2006. Beverly still writes a monthly column in both the South Shore Senior News and the Neponset Valley Senior News.