



By Therese Henman-Phillips, Caregiver Support Coordinator, Capital Region

Caregivers Nova Scotia is excited to share and promote the “Together for Fun/Ensemble Pour le Plaisir” Program. Previously implemented successfully in Quebec, the program is being developed and implemented here in Nova Scotia. I have had the opportunity to connect with Taylor MacKay, a research assistant associated with the program to follow its development across our province.

In a recent interview for this newsletter, Taylor shared that the “Together for Fun/Ensemble Pour le Plaisir” Program is an approach designed for caregivers and their care recipients, who have mild to moderate cognitive impairment, to share pleasant moments together by participating in simple and enjoyable recreational activities guided by trained facilitators. The goal is to optimize the health and well-being of care recipients and improve their quality of life in an appropriate recreational setting. The program will be delivered in both English and French depending on the need, and they anticipate having the program up and running in January 2022 in various communities across the province.

They understand that caregivers have challenging lives and they want to be as flexible as possible in how the program is run. If they can assist with barriers to participation, they will explore solutions. They are also open to both virtual and in person programming depending on the need. In its purest form, the program was designed to occur over six weeks with one hour involving an activity, a short break and then followed by a caregiver support group. The care recipient would continue to be supervised at this time while the caregiver participates in the support aspect, providing a mini respite period.

If the group wishes to meet more frequently than once a week, that is possible or if they wish to go beyond the six weeks, there is funding for the program to exceed the designated weeks. They are looking forward to the commencement of the program here in NS and are currently looking for interested caregivers and their care recipients to register. They are asking for a commitment to the program from caregivers and, if willing, would ask participants of the program to complete questionnaires/surveys on their experience that may assist them in their ongoing research. They very much want to have feedback on your experiences in the program so improvements can be made.

If there are facilitators, both English and French, who are also interested in being involved in the delivery of the program, they are open to hearing from you as well. An honorarium is provided to facilitators who commit to the delivery of the program.

Caregivers Nova Scotia is wishing Taylor and her team every success as they move forward. Caregivers interested in participating in the program, or who might have further questions, can reach out to Taylor and her team directly at 506-227-2213 or by email at Taylor.Mckay@dal.ca

When They Want To ‘Go Home’

By JoAnne Connors, Caregiver Support Coordinator, Capital Region

Hearing someone say, “I want to go home” repeatedly is something dementia caregivers often deal with. It can be frustrating to hear, especially when they’re already home.

When someone has dementia, their ability to use logic may be compromised. Explaining to them that they’re already home, or that they can’t go back to a previous home, can be both confusing and distressing. This can lead to an elevated level of anxiety for them. Because the person with dementia may not be able to process information quickly or effectively, they fill in gaps in their memory, to make sense of their situation. They are trying to orient themselves, with diminished reasoning skills. Instead of arguing, or telling them “the truth”, which can be disorienting and cause anxiety and distress behaviours, you can try these strategies in responding, which can calm and comfort them. The goal is to reassure and help them to reduce their fear and anxiety.

What are distress behaviours

A person living with dementia will have difficulty processing information and expressing their needs and feelings, verbally. As their dementia progresses, they become more reliant on expressing themselves through behaviour. Their processing time for taking in information and responding will also take longer. The kindest thing to do is to meet them where they are, cognitively, and focus on providing them with comfort and reassurance, responding to the emotions behind their request. The goal is to reduce their anxiety or fear so they can let go of the repetitive loop they’re stuck in. Helping them to be calm also gives you a chance to check for discomfort, pain or a physical need that may be causing the distress behaviour.

Here are three strategies to respond to their request to “go home,” or other repetitive loops. These suggestions will allow you to tailor your strategies to the person’s personality, preferences and history. The three strategies are Validate, Redirect and Distract.

Validate their feelings

Sometimes saying “I want to go home” is how your loved one tells you that they’re tense, anxious, scared or in need of extra comfort. By responding in a calm and positive manner, you will validate their needs and feelings. This helps them feel understood and supported. If you remain calm, this often helps them calm down as well. If they like hugs, give them a hug. Some folks use a soothing blanket, a therapy doll or stuffed animal when they get upset or confused. Getting to their eye level and reassuring them in a calm voice is also helpful.

Redirect

After reassuring them and validating their feelings, you can subtly redirect their attention. The redirection should lead into pleasant and distracting activities that take their minds away from wanting “to go home.” For example, when they ask to go home, you can say something like, “Yes we will be going home soon. I have something to do first. Would you like to help me?” That way, you are not arguing with them, thus keeping the situation calm.

CONT’D ON NEXT PAGE

Resources at www.caregiversns.org

By Brenda Sangster, Office Administrator

Many of the calls we receive are questions about finding resources. Although we are happy to help by answering these calls, we understand that not all caregivers can call for information during office hours. Our website is an excellent tool for finding many local resources and can be accessed 24/7.

We arrange the information under broad headings that will help you find exactly what you are looking for, or that will inspire you to explore. From our homepage, select "Resources" from the top menu bar, a light blue menu will appear on the right-hand side, select "Home Care and Other Services", then select the region you are from. This will take you to a new page listing a range of resources. Select any category to jump down to that section or peruse this page to see all the resources available for that region.

Some of the resource categories are listed below.

Home Care Providers - a list of agencies we are aware of in each region that offer a wide range of services such as personal care, nursing support, respite, palliative care, companionship, housekeeping, help with groceries, accompany clients to appointments, and more.

Companion/Personal Support/Errands - services may include companionship, meal preparation, light housekeeping, errands, laundry and more. This section also includes a link to a list of private home care providers for each region.

Downsizing/Decluttering/House Cleaning - help with any type of cleaning, such as spring cleaning, moving in or out, decluttering, and more. Contact one of these agencies to see if they can help you.

Grocery Delivery/Shopping Services - agencies that can help with

shopping and food delivery, groceries, medicine, and more.

Food Banks - organizations in your area that can provide food or furniture.

Meal Programs/Prepared Meal Delivery - several organizations that offer meals on wheels, frozen favourites, etc.

Mobile Services - blood collection, dental hygiene, foot care, hair stylists, physiotherapy/massage therapy, etc. that will visit in your own home.

Personal Alert Services/Home Health Equipment - devices and sensors to help you or your loved one remain independent.

Respite Care - contact information for those who can help with overnight care, pairing with activities, social outings, companionship care, etc.

Transportation - help with transportation to and from medical appointments, help with flights, etc.

Other Support Services - list of Private Facilities in each region, list of private care providers, information on accessibility in your community, mediators who help caregivers and families with difficult conversations, grief counselling, lawn care, snow removal, and so much more.

If you do not have access to the internet, or are not able to find a resource you are looking for, and want to talk to someone, we are available Monday to Friday from 9:00 am - 4:30 pm. Call us at 1.877.488.7390 to see what services are available in your area.

WHEN THEY WANT TO 'GO HOME' CONT'D FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Distract

Once you have redirected their attention, you can bring their focus to other activities that they enjoy in their current environment. You can casually shift to pointing out things that they like, offer a snack or drink, or go for a walk outside. Later, you can shift to another activity that is part of their daily routine. You could even encourage them to share their thoughts about memories of home, look at photos, and distract them.

Being able to redirect and distract are effective dementia care techniques. It is a skill that will improve over time and these new muscles you are developing will serve you well as your care recipient's dementia progresses. Don't feel discouraged if your first attempts don't work perfectly. Like any muscle, you must practice working it to make it stronger.

What if they cannot get out of the "Wanting to go home" loop? At times, a person with dementia will refuse to let go of the idea of "going home", no matter how much you try to soothe or redirect

them. At this point, you may want to agree to take them home and go for a brief car ride. See how long it takes before you can redirect them without protest. Perhaps you can stop for a treat, or run errands to distract and redirect. If it is not possible to go for a car ride, even going through the actions of what you'd normally do to go out, may be soothing. Meanwhile, these activities give you a chance to distract and redirect.

Remember that what worked once as a strategy, may not work a second time. Do your best to stay calm and be creative. Validating, redirecting and distracting become easier with practice.

And finally, remember that the person with dementia is doing their best, and that all behaviour is communication. Our role as a dementia caregiver is to look for patterns when we observe our care recipient struggling with distress behaviours or thought loops. Is there anything in the environment that is triggering, or something within them, such as a sensory issue or illness, that is causing their anxiety? A calm, soothing approach is a good strategy when trying to minimize distress behaviours and thought loops.