

Helping Children and Teens Understand Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease can have a big impact on everyone in your family. If someone close to you has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, it's important to talk about it with your children. This way, they can develop a better understanding and be better prepared for what is happening to the person with Alzheimer's. Although children and teens reactions will vary depending on who has the disease (a parent or grandparent, relative or friend) or how close the child or teen is to the person and where the person lives (in the same home, a nursing facility or out-of-state), it's important not to discount your children's reactions – just because they're children.

Children and Teens Reactions to Alzheimer's

They may feel:

- Sad about the changes in the person's personality and behavior
- Confused about how the person got the disease and why he or she now behaves differently
- Grief over the loss of the person they once knew
- Afraid of the behaviors that the person exhibits
- Worried or frightened that they or their parents might develop the disease
- Angry and frustrated by having to repeat activities or questions
- Guilty for getting angry or being short-tempered with the person
- Jealous and resentful of the increased amount of time and attention given to the person with Alzheimer's
- Embarrassed to have friends or other visitors to the house

Children and teens may exhibit emotions in ways you may not easily recognize. They may:

- Verbalize vague physical complaints, such as frequent stomachaches or headaches
- Perform poorly in school
- Spend more time away from home
- Stop inviting friends to the house

Ways to Help Children and Teens Cope

- Educate them about the disease and encourage them to ask questions
- Provide learning tools geared to their age level such as books, magazine articles and online resources to help them understand
- If possible, let them talk to a doctor, nurse or caregiver about the disease
- Keep lines of communication open
- Offer comfort and support
- Provide opportunities for them to express their feelings
- Let them know their feelings are normal
- Respond honestly to questions

Your Magellan Program is an Important Resource

To learn more about Alzheimer's log on to www.MagellanHealth.com/member to access a wealth of articles and community resources.

Adapted with permission from the Alzheimer's Association at www.alz.org

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