

Chapter 3 intro

1. Chapter 3: Maintaining relationships

1.1 Chapter 3

1.2 introduction

Hello, and welcome again to our programme on coping skills for families and carers. This is chapter 3: maintaining relationships. As with all our chapters we'll ask you to do some practical work and reflections. If you wish to use your reflection journal for those make sure you have it in front of you but don't worry if you don't have the printed version of the journal you can also use a notebook or a piece of paper.

1.3 Aspects of relationships

So far, we have talked about the importance of looking after the person with dementia in an individualised way, and the importance of looking after yourself. The next important message to share is how to look after your relationship with the person with dementia. In this chapter, we will cover three main aspects of the relationship:

Changing relationship: within a relationship, we all adopt certain roles, which may or may not be affected by dementia. In this chapter, we will show you how to adapt to new roles within the relationship and the wider family dynamic, and how to maintain an identity as an individual, a couple and a family.

Diagnosis and its impact on relationship: we will explain how to be open about a diagnosis with the person with dementia, the family and the wider community. We will look at why a diagnosis is important, and how to harness support from family, friends and community.

How to live with numerous losses: we will explain how to identify, understand and live with numerous significant losses, including how to understand and cope with loss of recognition as a wife, a daughter, a son. How to cope with a changing sexual relationship and how to face the future.

1.4 Roles in relationships

For most of us, the caring role is just a natural extension of our relationship with the person with dementia: we are their wife, husband, daughter, son. This role should continue as dementia progresses, but there may be some changes throughout the journey.

1.5 Changing relationship

As dementia enters our lives, life as it was may seem uncertain, and we may find a change in the role we have in the relationship. As well as being a husband, a wife, a son or daughter, we now have to take on a caring role. This added role brings another dimension to the relationship, which may need to be tweaked in some ways to accommodate these new responsibilities. These changes can be subtle, but can have far-reaching consequences.

Example:

In a traditional couple where the husband managed the finances and looked after the bills, and the wife was in charge of cooking and cleaning, these roles may need to change after a diagnosis of dementia.

If the husband has dementia, the wife may need to share the household tasks with her husband,

so that she can free sometime to look after their finances. She may feel overwhelmed if she had always seen the husband as her rock, taking charge and protecting the family.

If the wife has dementia, the husband may have a deep sense of loss, and may not know how to run a family, or how to keep adult children informed and close to their mother.

The most important thing is to keep an open mind about the changes to come. It is not unusual for role reversal to actually become a very enriching experience as time passes. If you find yourself with new responsibilities, it is important to take things slowly, ask for help if needed, and be patient. It takes time to learn any new task.

1.6 Working on strengths

The aim is to make the most of our strengths in living through the present and moving into the future. These include our personal qualities and values, our relationship with each other, our capacity for facing adversity and our abilities to plan ahead. By focusing attention on those strengths, and also encouraging people with dementia to employ them, we should strive to

- remember who we are and preserve our valued identities
- live with significant losses
- take on new challenges
- pace ourselves, and take it easy on ourselves
- keep going when times are tough
- prepare for and shape our future.

1.7 Dementia and the family

Notes:

When dementia happens in a family, there are challenges relating to relationships. Roles change. Sometimes relationships may become strained within the family, old challenges may reawaken, and disagreements may emerge regarding care. But in reality, everyone needs each other.

There are some ways of dealing with these changing dynamics:

- try to develop a care team that includes everyone who wishes to be involved.
- evaluate everyone's strengths: there will be financial, legal, medical, caring, domestic and social matters to consider
- evaluate everyone's ability to commit to the care team: it can become frustrating if someone commits to being part of the care team but is never available to help.
- be mindful that a diagnosis of dementia can arouse all kind of emotions in family members, such as guilt, anger, frustration, sadness, a sense of loss, and it is important to take all of these into consideration as they can influence a person's approach to care.
- if necessary, it may be appropriate to engage a family mediation specialist to help the family arrive at a consensus for the care of the person with dementia.
- family therapy is another formal way to help families to understand the family dynamics, and it can lead to a more cohesive approach to care, one that can work for all.

1.8 Maintain your own identity

In this changing relationship, it is important that you maintain some aspects of our own identity as an individual, separate to the caring role. Please click on the video to hear a dementia professional talk about the emotional and psychological importance of individual identity.

1.9 Questions: roles

In order to be prepared and know how you're going to adapt the roles within your relationship. Please take a moment to think about the following questions.

Within your relationship, what roles do you have?

Within your relationship, what roles does the person with dementia have?

Please list at least three roles for each of you,

1.10 Questions: activities

Please list the activities involved in these role

1.11 Questions: identity

Now, think about which roles are important to your personhood, and how can you maintain these?

1.12 Questions: independence

Are there certain roles the person with dementia can still maintain independently?

1.13 Questions: helping

Are there other roles for which they may need a little help?

1.14 Questions: independence

Are there roles that they need to give up?

1.15 Questions: sharing activities

Are there any activities from your roles that you can share with the person with dementia?

1.16 For more information



The screenshot shows a teal background with the Elevator logo at the top left. The text reads: "Coping Skills for Families and Carers", "You have finished: Introduction in Chapter 3: Maintaining Relationships", "You can now go to Part 1: Diagnosis", and "for more information, go to [Dementia Elevator](#)".

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Building Dementia Skills Capacity

Coping Skills for Families and Carers

**You have finished: Introduction
in Chapter 3: Maintaining Relationships**

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