



GROWING

TRAINING CORNER ... *Phyllis Hanvey*

GROWING - Through all the tears & the sadness & the pain comes the one thought that can make me internally smile again: I have loved! ("How to Survive the Loss of a Love", Melba Congrove, PhD.)

When our House of Friends participants move away from us for whatever reason, we can still smile with them, remembering that we have indeed loved. They may move to be closer to family members who may be able to take over the caring, or they may be ready to pass away, or the predicted course of Alzheimer's disease may dictate the need for an institutional level of care. For whatever the reason, we feel the grief of the loss, but in that feeling we will know that a new chapter has begun in their life, & in ours, & that all is well because we have loved.

How can we show that love now? A very loving technique we are attempting to use at the House of Friends, Validation Therapy, was developed by Naomi Feil as a communication tool which encourages us to accept the values, beliefs, & reality of the person with dementia—even if it has no basis in reality.

Dawn Lakamsani states in her article, "Validation Therapy: Helping Us Enter

the World of Dementia" that the definition of validation in Webster's is "to support; having such force as to compel serious attention & usually acceptance." When we practice validation therapy, we are supporting with serious attention & acceptance the reality of our House of Friends participants with dementia.

Lakamsani presents the example of a 62 year old man with dementia who says he is in High School & must get to the school's track meet to run the 100 yard dash. We might ask, "How fast can you run the 100-yard dash?" Feil teaches us to use very simple but powerful techniques to improve communication & interaction with those with dementia. The world of dementia is a very different one than the one in which we live, the world of "reality", as Feil's book, The Validation Breakthrough presents.

Time in the world of dementia operates completely differently than "real" time. Time is not linear in the dementia universe, but rather may be present time in one moment, past in the next, & future at another with no continuity. Memory may be there one moment & gone the next. The mind plays hurtful tricks in the world of dementia at times—making a loved one a dangerous stranger to be feared. We must

remember those with dementia define their world; we cannot & do not. We can only live in this world of dementia if we are willing to accept it on their terms, not ours. If they see a rabbit on the sofa, there is a rabbit on the sofa. If you are not their spouse, as badly as that hurts to acknowledge, you are not their spouse. The progression of dementia calls us at some point not to attempt to orient & re-orient the participant. Imagination & long-term memory are stored in the same area of the brain where the real & the imagined are interchangeable. We are more compassionate by entering their world rather than attempting to drag them back into ours.

Reasoning, judgment, insight – human cognitive abilities – will eventually disappear in Alzheimer's dementia. The spoken word may be difficult for the participant, but they may long be conscious of emotions expressed through our body language.

Those caregivers who are willing and able to become part of the world of dementia tend to be less frustrated, less overburdened, & better able to deal with caregiving demands. The caregiver who understands that time, memory & emotions are very different in this world of dementia tend to be more accepting of the ravages of this disease, & thus, a bit happier than those who continue to try to reorient to "reality."

Validation therapy helps us relate to our participants at their point of need, at their point of experience. It helps us to pay exquisite attention to them, to establish trust & to make each conversation meaningful and fulfilling.

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SAINT THERESA'S PRAYER

May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you....

May you be content knowing you are a child of God....

Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

It is there for each and every one of you.

