

Respite is mandatory in caregiving by Sharon Hall

There are staggering statistics of those who care for someone with dementia. Studies show that 40% of care partners of those living with dementia die before their peers and 25% die before the person living with dementia.

The only way to avoid being a part of these statistics is to get respite. Respite is a break from caregiving. This can be hours, days or permanent.

Let's talk about each of them

Hours- this is using day programs, they can be from 3 hrs to 12 hours, depending on the facility

Days- this is overnight breaks lasting 2 or more nights. This needs to be done every 3 months, but even once a year can help.

Permanent-this is placement in a facility 24/7. There is no shame in using this option, it does not mean you no longer care about the person, but it gets you back to being a wife, daughter, son, etc instead of a caregiver.

What if they won't go to a day program? Well, it depends on the person and the caregiver, but some things that help is 1) telling them you found a job or volunteer opportunity for them (you can even give the program an envelope with money in it to give them at the end of the day) 2) go to a program where you attend with them so they can see what activities are there and how they can meet others and then visit a day center where they can be left and let them see how enjoyable it is 3) call it a senior center or activity center 4) depending on cognition, tell them you need to have a day (or two or more) to accomplish things but need to know they are safe and so you need them to attend 4) Do what I did and say, get in the car. I took no excuse for not going, just like kids feigning sickness to get out of school, they had to show me fever or vomit to stay home. Once there for a few days they were dressed and ready before I was, it grows on them.

Isolation is deadly, to you and the person living with dementia. It takes some "therapeutic fibbing" sometimes, but respite is a requirement of caregiving. It makes you a better caregiver and gives them the opportunity to socialize without you there. Remember though, never give in to their complaints or whining about going, that is manipulating you to get what they want and is not healthy for either of you.

Do a trial run. Tell them they need to attend for 1 month, x number of days a week because you prepaid, or whatever works in your situation.

You can continue to let them rule the roost, but be prepared for depression, illness, and even early death. I have a good friend who did not listen to me about respite and ended up in the hospital 3 times. This taught her how important respite was. She now gets it regularly and has avoided further harm to herself.