

August 2022

Boomers, Elders, & More E-Newsletter

Monthly Elder Care Newsletter of the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center



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Child and Family Center

A Message from the Wellbeing Manager

The Vanderbilt Child & Family Center is available to support you in your role as a family caregiver. The center is always thinking about programs and events that will help you relieve some stress.

Over the last few months, the center has been planning sessions, with you in mind. In August (August 10), we will have Jennifer Kim, from Vanderbilt School of Nursing, providing tips to those who are long distance caregivers. In September (September 13), we will have a representative from Social Security discussing eligibility for retirement benefits; how does early retirement affect your benefits; and when should you file for Medicare. Also in September (September 21), a representative from the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) will discuss the Basics of Medicare. In October (October 5), Kanah Lewallen from Vanderbilt School of Nursing, will speak on How to Plan and Coordinate a Family Meeting. Lastly, in November (November 3), we will be celebrating you in honor of National Caregiver Month. Robbie Panepinto with Vanderbilt School of Nursing will be talking about Self-Care Tips for Family Caregivers. All sessions will be held from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Except for the Social Security session (September 13), which be held from 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.

As always, the Vanderbilt Child & Family Center appreciates your help in spreading the word about family caregiving resources that are available to the Vanderbilt Community.



Driving and Dementia

Are you worried about your loved one getting behind the wheel?

Some individuals in the early stages of dementia are able to successfully operate a vehicle. **However, as Alzheimer's disease and dementia progress, individuals are at increased risk for accidents.**

It is important for families to begin discussing safety while driving with dementia early.



How do Alzheimer's and dementia impact driving?

The ability to safely operate a vehicle and adhere to traffic laws takes hundreds of micro-steps and decisions, which may be adversely impacted by dementia. Alzheimer's disease and dementia can:

- Impact a person's sensory perceptions, such as depth or peripheral vision.
- Impair a person's judgment (e.g., the ability to decide if there is enough time to turn left before oncoming vehicles arrive).
- Cause general confusion, including discerning the difference between red and green lights, gas and brake pedals, and which side of the street to drive on.
- Lead to disorientation, leading individuals to get lost more often, even in the most familiar places.

Tips to start the conversation about driving with Alzheimer's disease and dementia:

- **Be sensitive:** Acknowledge how challenging it may be for your loved one and be sensitive that this loss of independence is difficult.
- **Plan it out:** Set aside time to share your concerns and to listen to your loved one's concerns.
- **Discuss the risks of driving:** Driving is already a risky activity. Discuss how the changes your loved one is experiencing may affect their ability to drive safely, through no fault of their own.
- **Do your research:** Familiarize yourself with state regulations on safe driving and license removal.
- **Focus on prevention:** Don't wait until it's too late before you make a plan.
- **Get the care team involved:** Request "back-up" by asking your loved one's physician for a "prescription" or note indicating that the individual should no longer drive. This way, the person may be less likely to direct feelings of anger toward you.

Warning signs that your loved one with Alzheimer's or dementia may need to stop driving:

- Increased disorientation, including lost, even in an area they have been driving for years
- Increase in misjudging speed or distance
- Getting into accidents (look for: dents or scratches on the car) or feeling at greater risk of having one
- Passengers are concerned about the individual's driving

Did you know? Vanderbilt Health offers a Driver Evaluation and Rehabilitation Program at Pi Beta Rehabilitation Institute. The program evaluates driving potential and ability of people who have had injuries or conditions that could make driving unsafe. Learn more at [Driver Rehabilitation Program | Vanderbilt Health Nashville, TN](#)

Full article - [Alzheimer's Foundation of America | Driving and Dementia \(alzfdn.org\)](#).

Therapeutic Activities for 3 Main Stages of Alzheimer's disease

Therapeutic activities are beneficial to individuals living with Alzheimer's at all stages of the disease. Therapeutic activities can increase cognitive function, provide joy and relaxation and contribute to healthy aging. However, different therapeutic activities may be more beneficial than others depending on which stage of the disease an individual is experiencing.

Early Stage (Mild)

In the earliest stage of Alzheimer's disease, people may:

- Forget words
- Misplace objects
- Forget something they just read
- Ask the same question over and over
- Have increased trouble making plans or organizing
- Be unable to remember names when meeting new people

In the early stage of Alzheimer's, these therapeutic activities may be beneficial:

- **Cognitive activities:** Trivia, word finds, card games, board games
- **Physical activities:** Fitness, walking, dancing, balloon toss, gardening, flower arranging
- **Social activities:** Discussion/conversation with loved ones, storytelling
- **Expressive activities:** Painting, collaging, creating/singing to music, journaling, writing letters to loved ones
- **Reminiscence:** Scrapbooking, cooking/baking, holiday traditions



Middle Stage (Moderate)

In the middle stage of Alzheimer's disease, people may:

- Forget details about themselves
- Forget details about time, seasons, dates and locations
- Have trouble cooking meals or ordering from a menu
- Get confused about what kind of clothes to wear
- Have a strong emotional need to have a purpose or care for something
- Have problems with sleep disorders
- Develop hygiene issues and incontinence
- Need help starting or continuing activities

In the middle stage of Alzheimer’s disease, these therapeutic activities may be beneficial:

- **Cognitive activities:** Activities of daily living tasks, such as folding laundry, washing dishes, sorting socks
- **Physical activities:** Easy to follow fitness activities, dancing freely to familiar music, guided walks, balloon toss
- **Social activities:** Pet therapy groups, engaging in discussions with familiar topics
- **Expressive activities:** Simple creative arts instruction, watercolor painting, singalongs
- **Reminiscence:** Flipping through photo albums, watching an old movie, interacting with a therapeutic doll/stuffed animal, aromatherapy



Late Stage (Severe)

In the late stage of Alzheimer’s disease, there is almost total memory loss. A person might:

- Recognize faces but forget names
- Mistake a person for someone else
- Experience delusions, such as thinking they need to work even though they no longer have a job
- Develop a strong need for holding something close for tactile stimulation, nurturing, companionship and comfort
- Lose basic abilities such as eating, walking and sitting
- No longer be able to identify thirst and hunger
- Need help with all basic activities of daily living

In the late stage of Alzheimer’s disease, these therapeutic activities may be beneficial:

- **Cognitive activities:** Activities that encourage hygiene like washing hands to familiar music, simple sensory stimulation activities
- **Physical activities:** Gentle and simple stretches/movement-based activities, scarf dancing
- **Social activities:** Pet therapy groups, human touch and love
- **Expressive activities:** Active music listening, tactile free-style artmaking
- **Reminiscence:** Flipping through photo albums, watching an old movie, interacting with a therapeutic doll/stuffed animal, aromatherapy



Alzheimer’s Foundation of America (AFA) offers virtual therapeutic activities 7 days a week at the **AFA Teal Room**, at 2:30 PM ET every day. [Recordings](#) are also available.

Full article - [Alzheimer's Foundation of America | Therapeutic Activities for 3 Main Stages of Alzheimer’s disease \(alzfdn.org\)](https://www.alzfdn.org/therapeutic-activities-for-3-main-stages-of-alzheimers-disease)

CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

The Caregiver Support Group is a monthly group that offers a safe place to discuss the stresses, challenges and rewards of providing care for an aging loved one. The meetings will be held virtually for the foreseeable future from noon to 1 p.m.

August's session will be held on Thursday, August 11, 2022, from noon to 1 p.m. Please RSVP (stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for Zoom details by Wednesday, August 10, 2022.



LEARNING SESSION

The Learning Session is a monthly educational meeting to receive valuable information while providing care to your loved one.

This month Jennifer Kim, with Vanderbilt School of Nursing, will be speaking on Tips for Long Distance Caregivers. She will be discussing tips for the long-distance caregiver to help manage their loved one's medical issues and living arrangements. She will also be providing ways to locate assistance and technology that can be used to connect long distance caregivers with their loved ones to keep them safe.



August's learning session will be held on Wednesday, August 10, 2022, from 1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Please RSVP (stacey.l.bonner@vanderbilt.edu) for Zoom details by Tuesday, August 9, 2022.

"The day the roles reverse is foreign. It's a clumsy dance of love and responsibility, not wanting to cross any lines of respect."

-Lisa Goich-Andreadis