



Caregiver Fact Sheet

Responding to Someone Who Says “I Want to Go Home”

People living with dementia, like Alzheimer’s disease, can get confused with time and their situation. They may ask for people who have passed away or say things like “I have to go work,” even though they’re retired. Some will say “I want to go home,” even if they are already home.

What is going on with the brain?

There is a part in the brain called the hippocampus that helps keep track of time and space. This part of the brain becomes damaged in people with dementia. As a result, they may:

- Lose their sense of direction and get lost in familiar places.
- Believe they are younger than they are. For example, they may think they’re teenagers and not remember their children.
- Miss meals, forget to take medications or take too much, not take a shower regularly, or complete chores.
- Not realize how much time has passed, which may result in asking the same question or telling the same stories again and again, not remembering recent conversations or things they’ve done, or not remembering recent visitors.

How can I respond to “I want to go home?”

- Don’t argue or correct your care partner by saying, “This IS your home.”
- You may need to shift your care partners’ attention to something else.
- They may be bored or seeking a connection. Engage them with physical activity like a walk around the block or some other enjoyable activity together.
- Give them purpose by asking for help with a task they can do.
- Ask them what they want to do when they get home, like see their mother, get something they need, or complete a task.
- If they need something or to complete a task in their home, see if you can provide them with a similar object or task to complete.
- If they’re missing a person, respond to their emotions and get curious.
 - For example, say “It seems like you really miss your mom. What do you love about your mom?” or “Who do you live with at home--your parents or a spouse?” “Do you live in Texas, or someplace else?” “Do you live in a big house or a small one?”
- Reminisce by looking at old photographs; but don’t correct them if they misremember a person, place or event that took place.
- Figure out if there’s a trigger, or something that causes them to want to go home. Do they ask to go home at a certain time of day, after a certain activity, or when they are around certain people? Once you figure out a pattern, see if you can change the trigger.
- Are they in a new place? This may make them disoriented and stressed. Give them time.
- Stay calm and take deep breaths to lower your stress level and take breaks when you can.

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