AROUND THE TABLE
SHARING OUR STORIES AT CHURCH

Church Leader Quick Sheet

Fast and fabulous ministry ideas for churches.

Conversations with Youth about Understanding the Dynamics of Dementia

The bond between grandparents and grandchildren is often unique and filled with warmth, laughter, and support. Grandparents may have more time to spend with their grandchildren and can offer a special kind of love. This bond can change with a diagnosis of dementia. It may feel confusing, emotional, or even overwhelming for youth as they watch someone they love experience memory loss or behavioral changes. But it's important to remember: the relationship doesn't have to end—it just changes.

Here are a few thoughts and tips to help leaders guide youth as they navigate this family challenge. These suggestions can also be helpful for any relationship with older adult friends.

BACKGROUND

Knowing the facts and figures about dementia will start young people on their way to understanding and acceptance which can open up avenues of support.

- Dementia describes a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking and social abilities. The symptoms interfere with a person's daily life. Dementia isn't one specific disease. Several diseases can cause dementia.
- Memory loss is one of the early symptoms of dementia. But having memory loss alone doesn't mean you have dementia because memory loss can have different causes.
- Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia in older adults, but there are other causes. Depending on the cause, some dementia symptoms might be reversible.
- Over one in nine people aged 65 or older has Alzheimer's disease. Overall, the percentage of people with this disease increases with age. For example, for people aged 65–74, the prevalence stands at 5.3%. Of those aged between 75 and 84, 13.8% have Alzheimer's. As for people aged 85 and older, 34.6% of them have the disease.

PULL UP A SEAT

Become a Dementia Friend

- Dementia Friends USA, a dementia friendly America Initiative, is a great resource to get youth thinking about how they can make a difference in their family and community. The videos on the home page offer great opportunities for youth to share their personal experiences and will give youth leaders a springboard for discussion. https://www.dementiafriendsusa.org
- Share signs of Dementia. https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/10_signs

Make Connections

- Youth can connect with older relatives and community members through music. It is embedded in the fabric of culture and identity. We have all been exposed to music, whether by listening to recordings, playing an instrument, attending concerts, or dancing. Music can elicit emotions and memories and help link to a person's past and promote interconnection. Recent findings suggest that musical training delays cognitive decline and promotes brain plasticity in the elderly brain.

Pull Up A Seat continued:

- Consider opportunities for youth as a group to engage in conversation and play with their grandparents or other senior adults, where they can become more comfortable and build relationships. One idea is to work with youth to host a Valentine's lunch or something for grandparents and senior friends at the church, with conversation starters on the table or a sing-along.

Communicate

- Many youth, who have a close relationship with their grandparents or other seniors, struggle with how to communicate with them now and so they tend to back off. This can be very confusing for a grandparent who remembers in their heart the bond between them and their grandchildren. Encourage open conversations, focus on what remains, and show patience and compassion.
- Guide youth in a discussion on how they can help someone with dementia using the tips found on the Youth Quicksheet - *My Grandparent has Dementia…What do I do?*

Dementia is often misunderstood, and sadly, stigma and misconceptions still surround it. Young people have the power to make a real difference. By learning the facts, talking openly, and challenging myths, youth can help bridge the gap between misunderstanding and empathy.

People living with dementia can still live full and meaningful lives, especially with love, care, and connection. Youth can be part of that journey—offering support, friendship, and continuing to build special bonds with older adults.

Written by Pat Baker, Director of Older Adult and Caregiver Ministries, St. Andrews Presbyterian Church Tucker, GA. This Quicksheet was written in collaboration with the Presbyterian Older Adult Ministry Network, www.poamn.org.
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