

The Savvy Caregiver Caregiver's Manual

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Introduction

The Savvy Caregiver Program (SCP) is a **training program** for caregivers. Caregivers are persons like you who care for family members who have a dementing illness, such as Alzheimer's disease.

Why Do You Need a Training Program?

You probably never expected to become a caregiver. And, you never trained for the role.

There are three important ideas in those last sentences:

- **Caregiving is a role.** Being a caregiver is different from being a spouse or child. Those terms describe relationships. Caregiving describes something a spouse or child does for his or her relative. It is work.
- **The caregiving role has a “job description.”** You couldn't hire other people to love the person you care for the way you do. But think about this. You could, *if you had the means*, hire people to do the things you do for that person. All those tasks put together – the helping, the cleaning up, the watching, the worrying, everything – make up the caregiver's job description.
- **The work of caregiving requires training.** Taking care of a person with a dementing illness is specialized work. To do this work successfully, caregivers need special skills and knowledge. They also need an outlook or attitude that helps them to look after themselves.

The Savvy Caregiver Program will give you that training.

Why “Savvy” Caregiver?

Our program’s name – Savvy Caregiver – is unusual and deliberate.

Savvy means “knowing.” Someone who is savvy is knowledgeable. The word also suggests being clever, even shrewd. The savvy person is smart and capable but is also able to stand just a little bit back from the situation. The savvy person uses this ability to look at what is going on and to develop the best possible response to the situation in order to increase the chances for long-term success.

We use the word “strategy” a lot in the program. A strategy is a deliberate action taken to achieve a specific aim. Good strategies generally are based on a good understanding of a situation. Caregivers need to develop strategies to accomplish the goals of their work. In the course of the program, you will learn about the strategies that a number of researchers and clinicians have developed in their work with persons with Alzheimer’s.* The most important thing, though, will be for you to work out how to make use of these strategies in your own caregiving.

Why Become a Savvy Caregiver?

Family members who take on the caregiving role are often under a lot of stress – usually for a long time. When dementia caregivers are compared with persons like them who are not caregivers, the potential perils of the situation are clear.

Dementia caregivers are:

- Twice as likely to have health and mental health problems
- Two-and-a-half times as likely to be taking medicine for their nerves
- Only half as likely to seek medical help for their problems
- More likely to feel cut off from their family and friends
- More likely to be pinched financially.

Being savvy about caregiving won’t stop the course of what you are dealing with or make it go away. Savvy caregiving won’t mean there will be no stress in the day-to-day or the long-term situation with which you are dealing.

* We’ll give you references to authors, books, articles and websites, so you can find more information if you want to.

But, savvy caregiving **can enable you to develop a sense of control or mastery**. It can help you to find ways to reduce the effects of caregiving stress and to increase your sense of satisfaction and accomplishment.

What's This Training Program About?

The Savvy Caregiver program is built on the notion that the successful caregiver has three main tasks:

- Manage daily life with the person
- Find and use help with caregiving tasks
- Take care of yourself

Managing Daily Life

This program stresses that the most reasonable goal of caregiving is to keep the person content and involved as much as possible. This program will help you to develop caregiving strategies to do that.

The training to promote contented involvement is built around two ideas.

- People are most content when they are doing things they enjoy and doing things without feeling anxious.
- Confusion is the principal problem in dementia. Confusion is the upsetting feeling of being mixed up and overwhelmed by all that is going on around. It is the root of many of the problems caregivers face, particularly problems related to behavior. And it hinders people from being content and involved.

(The remainder of this FREE 178-page manual will be available to you when you purchase the Savvy Caregiver DVD.)