Substitution VS Subtraction in Dementia Care

By Debbie Selsavage CDP

What is "Substitution VS Subtraction"? This can be a positive and very effective technique that should be used in caring for people living with dementia. Taking things away from your loved ones normally does not have the best results, but using the Substitution VS Subtraction technique will provide each of you with a better outcome.

Most of us without dementia, think with the logical part of the brain not the emotional part, we can see danger, but our loved ones do not see danger in the same way we do, they have lost their safety awareness. Because they think with their emotions, they deal with how things, people, and the environment make them feel.

Coping with Dementia presents an ABC of Dementia workshop in many locations for the more than 10 years, more than 1000 people attend each year. One of the things that we talk about is to never ***"Subtract"*** things from your loved ones, but to ***"Substitute".***

So, what that means is to find a way to meet their "***needs"*** before taking away the task or the item. One of the first things we would focus on is driving, so how do we get the "KEYS" from them. This will not end well if this is your only agenda; it may be the best thing for all, but they will not just hand over the keys easily. We are using driving in this case, but this technique will apply to all aspects of caring for a person living with dementia. So, to alleviate conflict you will have to try something different.

Most families avoid the hard subjects like driving because it will always lead to a very uncomfortable heated conversation. Your loved ones believe they are good drivers; they may say that they have never had a ticket or been in an accident. They are living in a different time in their life, and they have been driving for as long as they can remember. Some advice you may hear is they will be okay to drive if the stay within 5 miles from their house, this tends to be where most accidents happen.

One of the first things we have to look at is where our loved one's drive, and how we can get them to those places without them behind the wheel. We may validate that they are good drivers, we may have to call a friend to pick

your person up, you may create a purpose for your loved one to come with you.

What we are doing in this process is to try and eliminate the "***need"*** for your loved one to be in the car, not by humiliating them, or saying you can't drive anymore, you will get push back and resistance. By changing our approach, we can maintain their dignity as long as possible.

This goes beyond just driving, it is an approach in dementia care that we should use daily in every aspect of this journey with dementia. The more we understand that your loved ones need a purpose and importance, the better the journey of dementia may be for both of you.

When caring for someone in the journey of dementia, it's important to understand how hard this is for both of you, but the care partners are the only ones that can have a significant impact on the outcome, so we have to change how we see things.

As we have said many times "They are not trying to give you a hard time…They are having a hard time:'

Please do not do this alone. Find the support and knowledge to manage the journey of dementia.

Always keep in mind our slogan that you All Deserve The Best.

Debbie Selsavage is a Certified Trainer and Consultant in the Positive Approach to Care®, and a Certified Dementia Practitioner. Her company, Coping with Dementia LLC, is dedicated to making life better for individuals living with dementia. Contact Debbie at deb@coping.today to learn about free support groups online.