

Social Adult Day Programs and Persons with Memory Impairment

An option available to families caring for a person with memory impairment is adult day programs. Many times Alzheimer's Disease or dementia is used interchangeably. In this article we will use the term "memory impairment". These programs vary in size, structure, physical environment and amount and experience of staff

When are social day programs appropriate? When the person can still benefit from stimulating activities which encourage independence and decision-making in a protective environment; when continuing the social aspect of life is vital to the feeling of self-esteem; when maintain self-respect and productivity is challenged in a caring environment beyond the family.

In the time frame of the disease, the middle stage is the most appropriate time for social day programs. It is at this time that the person needs to be involved in activities that will continue to stimulate his abilities and allow for feelings of accomplishment. Under the care of professionals sensitive to the needs and limitations of the affected person, new experiences are both pleasurable, safe and satisfying. Often, the person learns something. Most important of all, during the day, the person is busy, independent, active and involved.

As a result, the family also benefits. The person returns home tired, content, less frustrated and ready to be with the family. The family members have had time to themselves, to be at work free from worry that the person might not be safe and/or have had to take care of himself. Having had the time to fulfill their own personal needs, the family members are more responsive to the person and are better able to cope. In addition, the family benefits from support services offered by the day care program and staff. Another very important aspect of social day programs is that they often serve as a viable transition to a more structured living accommodation or nursing home placement. The person has experienced time away from the family and the need to adjust to another environment, other people, schedules and routines. More importantly, a more structured living accommodation or nursing home placement may be prevented or delayed for months or years because the family gets the respite and the person gets the stimulation and support to maintain independence longer.

The earlier the person enters a social adult day program, the greater the benefits. If the family waits until they are totally exhausted and the person is more easily agitated, frustrated, confused, and disoriented, the more difficult the adjustment will be for them both. In the later stages, the stimulation provided may be too much and limitations of former abilities too severe to concentrate and understand the situation.

Adult day programs play an important role in sharing of the burden of care of the memory impaired. It is not a panacea, but is an option of value and worth from which family and affected individual alike can greatly benefit.