

# Leeza's Favorite Tips for Managing Public Life with a Loved One Who Has Alzheimer's Disease



- 1. Have A Special Color.** Yellow, for example. Make it Your Happy Color and every time you go out, both of you should wear it. That way if your loved one gets lost in a crowd, she just looks for the yellow shirt.
- 2. Care Cards.** These are almost like business cards that you can hand out in restaurants or in line for the theatre when others may not understand your loved one's behaviors. It can say something simple like: "My mom has Alzheimer's disease and sometimes it causes her to behave in unusual ways. She may get a little loud or repeat herself. Thank you for understanding"
- 3. Grocery Buddies.** Arrange a day and time with your local market when they know you'll be coming by with your loved one to shop. They know Dad has Alzheimer's but he likes to feel useful, so upon check out both you and Dad have a cart of groceries, but you are only charged for yours. While your items are being bagged, Dad's cart is pushed aside and re-stocked. Dad helps take the groceries to the car feeling good about helping.
- 4. Fashion Make-Unders.** Encourage independence and simplify choices by limiting wardrobe items to only those items that go together and that are easy on and off. All solids and primary colors, for example. No belts and accessories. If your loved one gets "stuck" on a outfit and wants to wear it all the time, be flexible and consider getting multiples of those favorites pieces. Your loved one may enjoy always knowing where her purse is or where his wallet is, so duplicates of inexpensive options can save the day.
- 5. Travel Pals.** A doll is not just a doll to someone with Alzheimer's. It can be security, a chance to show love and care, an important companion to guard against loneliness. You may want to see if your loved one responds to a doll or oversized stuffed animal, especially the ones that come with hair or fur to brush and a blanket to wrap around them. Of course, this is only appropriate at a fairly advanced stage, but can be very calming.
- 6. Music** is the last thing to leave our memories...it's so deeply embedded in our emotional DNA. Having an iPod with headphones to playback specially chosen songs from your loved one's youth is a great tool for entertainment, distraction and calming. If you have an iPad and can get YouTube videos of old musicals, those are great, too.



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**7. Lose Your Logic.** Emotions with Alzheimer's patients can be strong. Logic and reasoning are not. Don't waste your time asking them "Why" they did something. Your wife probably doesn't know why she ate food off another person's plate or why she "stole" a candy bar from the check out line? Instead of asking why, it's best just to say, "there's plenty of food here and if you want something else I can get it for you" or "I think these are two dollars, let's go pay for it". Asking why or reprimanding will lead to a potentially hurtful argument you'll likely regret. Remember you must join the Alzheimer's patient in their world. They can't find their way to yours.

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## Care for the Caregiver Don't wait to be asked!

Saying, "Let me know if I can help" is great, but just jumping in is better since most caregivers can't even figure out what THEY'RE supposed to do, much less how to direct you to help. Here are some ways to be helpful that they'll be sure to appreciate.

1. I'm making beef stew tomorrow night, I got enough to double the recipe so I'll bring some over for you. It's easy to freeze.
2. After work, I'm headed to the store; e-mail me your list so I can get what you need.
3. I have a couple of days this week with afternoons free. Let me know which ones would be best and I'll come sit for you so you can run out and do some errands.
4. How about if I swing by before work tomorrow and pick up your laundry. I can get it back clean to you tomorrow.

Texts, phone calls, e-mails, and cards, all of those are wonderful supportive hugs, but sometimes an in person drop-by with a cup of coffee or a gift card for a restaurant or movie or just a smile can make a huge difference.

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*I think all Caregivers are Heroes and Warriors. To thrive and not just Survive your Caregiving Journey You've got to Take Your Oxygen First and become what we call WoW'd...*

## WARRIORS OF WELLNESS!

If you've got a desire to reclaim your life, **You're a warrior.**

If you're tired of wondering, "Is this all there is?" **You're a warrior.**

If you aren't ready to give up on YOU because you're showing up for someone else, **You're a Warrior.**

To be a Warrior of Wellness you want to be more than physically fit, you want to be strong and ready for whatever is next. You want to be spiritually alive and excited to own your life.



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**Here are my top THREE things you can put to work in your life right now to go into Warrior Mode:**

**1. Say No by Saying Y.E.S.** If you're a YES-aholic like me your life is probably cluttered because you aren't so good at saying "No". Well, here's how I got into recovery and you can too. Before you say YES to anything, think of YES as standing for Your Empowerment System. What does it take to make you feel empowered? You probably need to feel valued, respected, worthy, safe, capable, etc. So, how come you say yes to so many things and then immediately begin to feel terrible? It's amazing how many things we do that actually make us feel badly about ourselves. Like being a pushover for volunteering to handle everything yourself again! Or stay late at work or whatever? Before you agree to do anything, make sure it fits in Your Empowerment System. If it's not a "YES" for you, shake your pretty head and walk away!

**2. Warriors are not victims.** Period. So banish the blame and claim victory over victimization. You can't reach for tomorrow if your hands are filled with yesterday's junk. Louise Smith said that and she may as well have written it about caregivers. This is NOT the life you ordered. Yes, and??? It's where you are now and the sooner you can move forward, the better. By the way, in your elevator to success on this one you may have to stop and let some people off because not everyone can take this trip with you. That's ok. Release them and move on.

**3. Find Your Sanity Sanctuary.** This is non-negotiable. Caregiving is not a sprint. To go the distance in the marathon, you've got to fuel up with the things that keep you on track. So, if it's your yoga class or your morning newspaper, carve it out. If it's your nightly bubble bath or your stroll around the block with Spot, protect it like it's the last great thing on earth. Pay attention to those rare moments when you're NOT feeling overwhelmed and make them routine. They say it takes 21 days to create a habit, so habitualize survival- no matter how trite or trivial it may seem to anyone else.

**Leeza Gibbons**



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