



When Memories Start to Fail: Four Ways to Help Children Cope with Dementia in Loved Ones



This article is an exclusive partial excerpt from *My Singing Nana* by Pat Mora. You can purchase the full book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#) and entering code MPKIDS20 at checkout.

Families savor happy memories. Cooking together, singing, reading, telling stories, hosting family gatherings—all of these experiences can create lovely memories. A child who gets to spend time with a beloved grandparent or other senior often develops a special connection with that person. Along with those special memories and connections also come the challenging realities of aging.

How do children respond to grandparents or other seniors who may begin to experience memory loss, and where do children have opportunities to share and discuss their confusion, worries, and feelings?

My Singing Nana, by Pat Mora, explores a child's experience as his grandmother begins to lose her memory. The note to parents provides some strategies to help a child understand and cope with a loved one's developing dementia.

Be truthful with children. Share age appropriate information. In the story, Billy and his grandmother, Nana, have a special bond. They bake, read, and sing together. When Nana begins to have trouble remembering things, Billy is worried. His mother explains that Nana does have trouble remembering things, and that she took Nana to the doctor. The doctor said that Nana sometimes needs their help. Billy's mother answers his questions and assures him that he and Nana can still do the things they like to do together.

Encourage children to share their worries with their parents and other trusted family members or teachers. Children's questions provide clues about appropriate issues to address with a child and his or her level of understanding. In the story, Billy's mother notices that he is worried and asks him what is the matter. She listens to his concerns about Nana and answers his questions.

Remind children to be polite and patient with their family members. When a loved one exhibits memory loss, a child might not know how to react. Billy's mother explains that Nana needs their help. When his Nana can't remember things, Billy and his siblings gently remind her.

Model loving, thoughtful behavior that strengthens family bonds. Showing a child that, even though a loved one may be struggling to remember things, including him or her in family experiences sends a powerful message of love and support. In the story, although Nana is beginning to experience the early stages of dementia, her family continues to include her in their daily routines. Billy even figures out a way to draw on his special connection with Nana to include her in a family event by singing with her.

Coping with the challenges of aging is difficult for all family members, children and parents alike. Being honest about what is happening, encouraging discussion and expression of feelings, and modeling and encouraging loving support and care can help your child through this process.