



Memory Loss and Love: Helping Children Understand Alzheimer's Disease and Dementia



[September is National Alzheimer's Month.](#) Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia, affecting about 6 percent of people 65 and older. Scientists don't know what causes Alzheimer's, but they suspect it's a combination of many factors. The disease affects parts of the brain that control memory, thought, and language.

Alzheimer's impacts the entire family. Children will notice changes in their loved ones as the disease progresses. *My Singing Nana* by Pat Mora explores a child's experience as his grandmother begins to lose her memory.

Here's a repost of an excerpt providing strategies to help kids to understand and cope with a loved one's developing dementia.

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? Try these strategies:

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.

This article is an exclusive partial excerpt from *My Singing Nana* by Pat Mora, published by Magination Press.

This Article's Author

Pat Mora has published more than 35 books that have earned immense praise. Her recent books include *Bookjoy*, *Wordjoy*; *The Remembering Day / El Día de los Muertos*; and *Water Rolls*. Her titles have appeared on the ALA Notable Books list, the Texas Bluebonnet Master List, been awarded Pura Belpre honors, been placed on the Notable Books for a Global Society list, and have been honored by the International Latino Book Awards, the Tomas Rivera Mexican American Book Awards, the Americas Book Awards, and much more. A literacy advocate excited about sharing what she calls "bookjoy," she founded the annual Children's Day, Book Day – in Spanish, El día de los niños, El día de los libros, "Día." Pat is a popular speaker about creativity, inclusivity, and bookjoy. She is always working on new books. She lives in Santa Fe, NM.