

# The Thurston-Mason Senior News

A Free Service of The Thurston County Council on Aging

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## “Caregiving Lies”

“I am caring for my mother who has dementia. She asks the same questions over and over. Is it OK to lie to get her off the topic and keep my composure?”

Some caregivers advocate lying to their family members as a way of dealing with the stress of repeated questions, which is a significant symptom of many dementias. Whether you call it a “white lie”, “fibulation” or “permissive truth”, they are untruths. The tendency is to say something to make the questions stop, especially when they ask the same questions over and over. In these situations you need a break from the demands of being asked repeated questions. Especially those questions which may, if answered truthfully, trigger sadness, grief, and despair in your care receiver.

However, we make a case for telling them the truth. The truth as they are able to understand. If your care receiver has dementia and



repeatedly asks “where is Robert?” is not necessary to say “Robert died 17 years ago.” Because each time you answer, they briefly relive the bad news of his death because it is “new” information to them.

When they ask where Robert is how about answering “he is not here” or “I have not seen him”, “I do not know when he will be back”, “I do not know”.

The truth as they can understand may be followed by a diversion from the question to a food or activity they enjoy. “How about some ice cream?” “Let’s get a snack?” “How about we listen to some music” “Let’s walk to the mailbox?”

Another reason to avoid “the lie” is that it is on the slope of disrespect. It may be a brief convenient deception, but can, by degrees, move toward insensitivity and disrespect.

When addressing your care receiver use your best judgment and your heart when speaking with them. Doing so may keep you from slipping down that slope of disrespect which can easily lead to being rude, hurtful, and even become harmful.

Equally important is to be honest about how you are feeling about your caregiving ability and toward your care receiver. Both are directly related to your capacity to provide care with respect. If you cannot muster a neutral answer to their questions, it is more than time to get help.

It is OK to ask for help.

This article is a service of the Lewis Mason Thurston Area Agency on Aging. For more information about the Family Caregiver Support Program, call (360) 664-2168 and ask to speak with a Resource Manager or visit our website at [WWW.LMTAAA.ORG](http://WWW.LMTAAA.ORG)