

# Together We Can!



**Community Teaching Guide:  
Using the fotonovela to  
teach caregivers about  
self-care and the care of others.**

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## Introduction

The fotonovela, *Together We Can! Facing Memory Loss as a Family* was developed by a team of caregivers, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, researchers and fotonovela producers to teach caregivers how to care for people with dementia while taking care of themselves. The main message of the fotonovela is “Caregivers who take care of themselves, give better care.”

So often, we come across caregivers who, in caring for others, neglect to take care of themselves. When this happens, caregivers often get depressed and the quality of their life suffers. They may feel like they are sacrificing too much. In the case of taking care of family, they may feel powerless and guilty. If they are professional caregivers, they may decide that the work is just too hard and stop caregiving.

We hope that by reading the fotonovela, *Together We Can!* and sharing your own stories with others that you may find support, learn better ways to take care of the patient, friend, or loved one, and most of all, take better care of yourself.

The fotonovela helps those who are caring for people with dementia by making these main points:

- Taking care of someone with dementia is difficult. It’s okay to admit it. You are not alone.
- If you are a caregiver, taking care of yourself means the following:
  - Find support. Friends, counselors, family members, support groups and spiritual advisors can help.
  - Set aside time for yourself. Get plenty of rest.
  - Learn about dementia.
  - Learn about community services.
  - Attend informational meetings about dementia and/or Alzheimer’s disease.
  - Ask for help when you need a break.
  - Set up routines for the person you are taking care of.
  - Inform family members how they can help. Ask for specific help such as, help taking care of the patient; help buying things the patient needs like adult diapers, clothing, and other things; help with calling doctors and other health care providers; help with cleaning the house or cooking.

- Talk to your doctor about any changes you see in the person you are taking care of.
- Talk to your doctor if you feel your own mental and physical health are suffering as a result of you being a caregiver.

This guide is meant to guide the instructor, community health worker and/or social worker to use the fotonovela as a teaching tool. We have several teaching activities that we hope will engage participants and help them learn better self-care and caregiving skills.

## **Main Points of the Fotonovela:**

- The first step in taking care of someone with dementia and/or Alzheimer's disease is to get a diagnosis, page 4.
- Find and get personal and professional support, pages 5 and 6.
- Keep a routine for the patient, page 6.
- Change the way you look at the patient's behavior. Remember, your patient or loved one is not misbehaving on purpose, page 7.
- Try not to engage in conflict with the patient, page 8.
- Use distraction techniques when patient acts irrationally, pages 9-13.
- Look into adult day care centers in your area, page 10.
- Get support, page 11.
- Take safety precautions, page 13.
- Learn how to cope with bizarre behavior, pages 10 and 15.
- Don't take it personally, page 15.
- Consult with professionals, page 17.
- Ask for help from family members, page 19.
- Take care of yourself first, page 20.
- Sometimes caregivers get depressed. Look for signs of depression. If you are depressed, get help. Don't suffer alone, page 20.

## Teaching Ideas and Activities

Here are some activities that use the fotonovela to teach caregivers about taking care of themselves.

### Activity 1: Read and Act Out the Fotonovela

1. Prepare by reading the fotonovela before your group meeting.
2. The day of your group meeting, give each person a copy of the fotonovela and assign the following roles:
  - Doña Rosa - Abuela – the person with dementia
  - Delia – the daughter
  - Manuel – the son
  - Consuelo – daughter-in-law
  - Mercedes – granddaughter
  - Jose Manuel – grandson
  - Doctor
  - Social Worker
  - Comadre Socorro
3. After roles are assigned, ask each person with an assigned role to read their part out loud. Encourage the group to act out the part and have fun.
4. After the group acts out the fotonovela, ask the following questions:
  - How many of you have experienced what Delia has experienced?
  - How did you feel? What did you do?
  - How many of you understand what happened with Manuel? Why do you think Manuel acted the way he did at first? What made him change his mind?
  - Do you have someone like Comadre Socorro in your life? Who is that person and how does she or he help you? If you don't have someone in your life right now, can you identify someone who could help you in the future?

- What steps can you take after today that will help you take better care of yourself? Which is the most important step to work on first?

## **Activity 2: Read and Act Out the Fotonovela – Part 2**

1. Prepare by reading the fotonovela before your group meeting.
2. The day of your group meeting, give each person a copy of the fotonovela and assign the following roles:
  - Doña Rosa - Abuela – the person with dementia
  - Delia – the daughter
  - Manuel – the son
  - Consuelo – daughter-in-law
  - Mercedes – granddaughter
  - Jose Manuel – grandson
  - Doctor
  - Social Worker
  - Comadre Socorro
3. After the group reads/acts out the fotonovela, divide the group into pairs.
4. Give each pair about 20 minutes to take turns discussing the following questions:
  - Did you get a diagnosis for your patient right away or did you wait?
  - If you had to give someone else advice about getting a diagnosis, what would you say?
  - Where did you find personal and professional support? What would you suggest to others in your shoes?



### **Activity 3: Learning Skills to Take Better Care of the Patient and Yourself**

- What do you think about the teaching point in the fotonovela to “Keep a routine for the patient?” Have you tried this? If you have, share about how this went. If you haven’t, talk about what you could do to keep a routine for the patient? What will be the biggest challenge in doing this? Do you need help? Who can help you do this important part of taking care of yourself and the patient?
- On page 7, it says, “A step towards better care is to change the way you look at the patient’s behavior.” What does this mean? How does changing the way you look at how the patient acts help you take care of yourself?
- On page 8, Socorro tells Delia to act as if she were a nurse instead of a daughter. Read pages 8, 9 and 10 again. What is the story trying to teach you? Is this a helpful tool? Why or why not?
- On page 13, the family encounters the need to take safety precautions. What safety precautions have you taken? Are there safety precautions that you need to take? List two things you will do to take safety precautions when you return home?
- From pages 10-15 – Delia learns about coping with unusual behavior. Have you experienced something like this? How did you get help? From whom?
- One piece of advice to caregivers is “Don’t take it personally!” Why do you think this is important? Is it difficult or easy to do? What did you do to help yourself with this important piece of advice?
- Go back and read page 8. What did Delia, Socorro and Mercedes do? Did it work? Why? Do you think you can try this with your patient or loved one? Why or why not?
- On pages 9-13 Socorro uses distraction to manage Abuela’s dementia. Can you think of a time when you could have used this technique? What can you do next time something like this comes up?

## Activity 4: Getting Support

- Why do you think Delia said her brother wouldn't like the idea of taking their mother to an adult day care center?
- What do you think about the concept of day care centers for adults?
- There's a lot of talk in the fotonovela about getting support. How do you get support? What is the most difficult part about asking for help? What have you learned about getting support that you would like to share with others?
- Have you consulted with professionals regarding the person you are taking care of? Who are the professionals that can help you? Make a list.
- If you have already consulted with professionals, tell us how it helped.
- What is the biggest barrier in getting professional help?
- Do you attend a support group? Can you share your experience about attending a support group?
- Have you attended Alzheimer's workshops to learn about the disease and caring for your loved one? Can you share something you learned there?
- Does the family of the patient help you take care of the patient? If you are a family member, do other family members help? What can you tell others about getting family members to help? What worked for you? What could you do to get more family help?
- What are some other ways that family members can help?

### **Activity 5: Depression**

1. After the group has read the fotonovela either by acting out the different roles of the different characters or by reading the fotonovela to themselves, ask if anyone can define depression.
2. Here is a definition you can share with the group: Depression is feeling sad or empty most of the day, nearly every day, with no desire, interest or strength to be around people, be seen by people, or participate in activities of pleasure. You feel like you just want to be alone and you find yourself sleeping a lot. It is a struggle just to get through the day.
3. Direct the group to page 20 of the fotonovela. Explain that there are some questions to answer that could help them assess if they are experiencing depression.
4. Advise that if they checked more than two answers, they should seek the help of a counselor, doctor or spiritual advisor.
5. Ask: Do you have anyone you can go to for help? (Perhaps the group can help with some suggestions.)

### **Activity 6: Favorite Things**

Copy the hand-out on the next page and have participants complete the questions. Go around the room and have each person share one thing they like to do that is fun or relaxing in some way.

## **My Favorite Things (Hand Out)**

Write down the answers to these questions and be ready to share one or two of them in a group.

1. Make a list of 5 things you enjoy doing the most. This is a list of your favorite things to do.
2. In the last week, how many of your favorite things did you do?
3. If you said less than two, how can you increase doing the things you like to do?
4. Write down one more thing you will do in the next week that you enjoy and that helps you relax and/or have fun.

## **Activity 7: Calming Yourself**

**Use the following questions to spark discussion...**

1. After reading the fotonovela, what do you think Delia likes to do to have fun and relax?
2. When you are stressed, anxious, sad, and overworked, what do you do that brings you peace and tranquility?
3. What are some ideas for relaxing and taking time for yourself?

**Go around the room and ask each person to share what they like to do to relax.**

**Share some of these ideas:** Pray. Meditate. Listen to music. Take a hot bath. Have a cup of herbal tea. Go for a walk in a safe neighborhood or park. Call a friend. Take a yoga class. Sit in your garden. Plant a garden. Set up a little corner of your house with a nice chair, a plant or perhaps a candle and have it as a special place to go and sit for 5 minutes without doing anything else. Watch the birds. Knit. Crochet. Embroider. Make a collage. Prepare your favorite health meal. Sing. Dance. Go for a bike ride)

## **Activity 8: My Own Special Place - Relaxation Script.**

**Read this script to the group...**

### **My Own Special Place**

1. Close your eyes and take three deep breaths.
2. Start with your toes and relax each part of your body as you continue to breathe in slow and steady breaths. With each breath, feel your body let go of any tension it might have in any part of your body. Relax your feet, flex them gently and relax the muscles. Focus on your legs and let them gently relax. Move your breath up to your thighs, then your abdomen and belly and take slow deep breaths as you gently let your body relax and let go of any tension. Move up to your chest, your shoulders and down your arms, all the way to your fingertips. Take slow deep breaths and allow each part of your body to relax and let go of tension. Move up to your neck, face, eyelids and forehead and take slow breaths and tell yourself to relax.
3. Once your body feels relaxed, imagine that you are going to a special place. Perhaps this place is in nature in a place you love, like a park or some woods that you know. Perhaps it is a beach you've been to. Take a few deep slow breaths and picture yourself looking at the waves of the ocean or hear the chirping of birds in the trees. Stay in this place in your mind for a few minutes or as long as you want. As you breathe in, picture yourself getting more and more at ease and relaxed. As you breathe out, picture the tension and stress blowing gently away.
4. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and look around the room. Know that you can do this every day and even several times a day for 5 or 15 minutes to let go of your tension and go to your own special place.

## **Resource Page**

**Use this blank page to write down phone numbers or web addresses for place where you can go or people you can call for help.**