



## How to help and cope with suspicion, delusions, and paranoia

Over the last few weeks many of the questions I have been asked revolve around the **above** " what shall I do or say when my loved one accuses me of stealing"? or "my loved one thinks there is some else living in the house".

It can sometimes be very difficult to cope when the person you are looking after living with dementia experiences delusion, paranoia, or suspicions, they are a common symptom of dementia. It can take a lot to manage if the person you are looking after is in the grips of one of these symptoms.

### So, what is a delusion?

When someone is deluded it is a situation for them that could happen in real life, having a situation that is false, but they believe to be true.

The delusion can often lead to extreme suspicion of others around them even the people they love. An example of this is that they may think you are trying to trick them, or indeed steal from them.

Often, they may believe that there is someone else in the house and that person is out to get them.

You may a situation when the meal you prepare for them gets pushed to one side because they think that it is poisoned.

There are different types of delusional disorders.

Now paranoia occurs because of delusion and this can be a way for the person to project a fear of something, but we must remember also paranoia can be caused by hallucinations.

The cause of paranoia and delusions when someone is living with dementia varies from person to person and can often start around the mid stage as they start to have more gaps in their memory they try to fill those gaps with faulty memory or a delusion that makes **"sense to them"**.

## How can we help in this situation?

- ✚ **Don't argue with the person** or try to convince them that what they are saying is not true.

For example don't respond with "don't be silly why would I do that" or "you are being stupid over this" these remarks will undoubtedly cause the person to be agitated and also possibly feel like you are not really listening to them. Its much easier to back down and take a deep breath.

- ✚ **Secondly, Don't take it personally**, if you are with a paranoid person and experiencing worry and despair at this time do not take offence and remember you are not alone. Step into their shoes just for a short while to see if there is a potential trigger for this moment.

- ✚ **Reassurance** go with the emotion and not the facts, provide reassurance without an argument or lengthy explanations, if they have lost something or they think it has been moved tell them you will help them look for it.

If you are being accused of not visiting or often it may be they think you are being unfaithful by seeing some else when you are out try not to take it to heart they will perhaps have a fear of being left or abandoned, provide reassurance at this point that you are there for them and sticking with them.

- ✚ **Have spare items** if it is the same thing that keeps going missing i.e. handbag, glasses keys have a spare as close to the original as possible, this really does help.

If someone wants the house keys or car keys constantly then have a set that looks like the ones that open the door or car sometimes it's just the habit of having the keys like with a lady always having her bag etc.,,

- ✚ **Switch focus when possible** before getting swept along in supporting a false claim which is easy to do, think about observe and reflect and try a **distraction technique** for example 'before we look for your glasses, why don't we have some lunch and we will look after that'.

- ✚ **A good tactic** is to empathise with the **feeling** but don't **disagree or agree** with the facts.

If only we could understand and grasp this confusing illness until such time we need to observe, reflect, and not judge this will lead to a better, deeper understanding. Remember a person living with dementia who is experiencing these symptoms is trying to make sense of the world while at the same time are dealing with cognitive decline, confusion and fear. For many people they can be far more troubled than they appear.

**So, it's important to ensure that other family members and friends understand this too and that they take their lead from you. Remember you're the expert!**