

RISE TOGETHER

A QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



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Conversations that Count: Honoring Goals, Wishes, and What Matters Most

When someone we care for begins to experience changes in thinking or memory, many of us feel a quiet weight settle in. It's the awareness that things are shifting—and the uncertainty of how to prepare. We begin to wonder: *Do I really know what matters most to them? If decisions need to be made, will I be ready?*

These aren't easy questions. But person-centered care has never been about ease—it's about relationship. And it's not just about how we meet a person's needs day to day. It's about how we honor their voice, their values, and their sense of self across time.

That's what these conversations are about. They're not about control or crisis—they're about connection. And beginning them, even imperfectly, is one of the most meaningful acts of love we can offer.

When You're Afraid to Start the Conversation:

It's completely normal to feel nervous. Many care partners hesitate because they're afraid of upsetting the person they support. Some worry that bringing up the future feels like giving up hope. Others simply don't know how to begin.

If that's you, take a breath. You are not alone in this.

One gentle strategy is to shift the conversation to *yourself* first. Instead of asking directly,

“Can we talk about what matters to you if your health changes?” try saying:

- “I've been thinking about how I'd want to be cared for if I ever got sick. Can I share it with you?”
- “It's important to me that people know my wishes. Would it be okay if we both thought about what matters most to each of us?”



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You can also ask the person directly, using gentle, open language:

- “Have you ever thought about what kind of care you’d want if things got harder down the road?”
- “If you were ever in the hospital, what would you want me to know about how to support you?”
- “Is there anything you don’t want—something that would feel wrong or uncomfortable for you?”
- “What helps you feel safe and calm when things are stressful?”

Sometimes people living with dementia respond with clarity and insight, especially in early stages. Other times, their responses may be more emotional than specific. Either way, these moments give us a chance to listen with compassion and deepen the relationship.

This Is Person-Centered Care:

In our last issue, we explored how person-centered care keeps the individual at the heart of every decision. That commitment doesn’t end when someone can no longer fully express themselves.

These conversations help us preserve that sense of self. They guide us in making decisions that reflect what the person values—not just what’s available. It might be as simple as knowing they’d want music playing at the bedside. Or as complex as understanding that they wouldn’t want aggressive treatment that might extend life but reduce quality.

Either way, the core question remains the same: *How can we honor who this person is—through every stage of their journey?*



“To care for someone is to learn the song in their heart and sing it back to them when they have forgotten.”
— Arne Garborg.

Putting Wishes in Writing: Tools to Know

Verbal conversations are powerful. But in moments of stress, grief, or medical urgency, written documents can provide clarity and peace of mind. They help avoid conflict, confusion, and unintended decisions.

Emergencies don't wait until we feel ready. That's why it's so important to have this information prepared and accessible *before* a crisis arises. In urgent moments, having the person's preferences in writing gives care partners and professionals a way to uphold their voice, even if they can't speak for themselves.

Key documents include:

- Durable Power of Attorney (POA)
- Healthcare Proxy (Medical POA)
- Living Will or Advance Directive
- POLST or MOLST (varies by state)
- Five Wishes

Even the most loving family members can feel unsure in a moment of crisis. Having these documents helps reduce conflict, minimize guilt, and ensure the person's values are honored.

Many families find it valuable to work with an elder law attorney to draft and execute these documents with confidence.

A Moment That Stays With Me

Recently, I spoke with a daughter who had attended a community talk and began gently asking her mom questions about what mattered to her—just in case. At first, her mom seemed unsure. But after a pause, she quietly said, "*I just want to be where the people I love are.*"

That one sentence changed the way the daughter approached caregiving from that day forward. It wasn't about getting every step right. It was about staying close.

These are the kinds of moments that remind us why these conversations matter—not just for planning, but for deepening connection.

"Even when words are lost, the heart still speaks—and we can still listen."

— Maureen Braen, *Rise Dementia Care*.

A NOTE FROM MAUREEN

As we navigate the changes dementia brings, I want you to know you're not alone. Rise Dementia Care was created to offer not just education, but encouragement and connection.

I'm walking to raise awareness and funds for the Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's® – Bergen-Passaic on 9/14/25. Join me or donate to support care, research, and a future without dementia.

[Click Here to Support my walk](#)

With gratitude,
Maureen

WHAT'S NEW AT RISE DEMENTIA CARE

New on the Blog:

- *Glass Half-Full: Reframing Dementia Care with Purpose and Possibility*
- *When Everything Feels Like It's Changing*
- *Trust: The Heart of Connection in Dementia Care*
- *Relationships That Hold: Trust, Connection, and Support in Dementia Care*

Read more at: www.risedementiacare.com/blog

RESOURCE CORNER

Book Spotlight:

Successfully Navigating Your Parents' Senior Years by Star Bradbury

Recommended Websites:

[The Conversation Project](#)
[Five Wishes](#)
[CaringInfo.org](#)

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Town Square – Bergen County

A 1950s-inspired adult day program offering engaging, reminiscence-based experiences for individuals living with dementia.

www.townsquare.net/adult-day-care/new-jersey/bergen-county

The Kaleidoscope: A Gathering and a Conversation Series

The Kaleidoscope is a Dementia Caregiver Support and Resource Center hosted at Abundant Life Reformed Church in Wyckoff. Monthly Saturday gatherings offer a welcoming space for care partners and individuals living with dementia.

In conjunction with this, **Rise Dementia Care** leads the **Kaleidoscope Speaker Series**, launched June 11 and held every **second Wednesday from 5:30 – 7:00 PM**. This evening series offers educational talks and meaningful conversation for care partners.

Both programs are free and open to the community.

Learn more at:
www.abundantlifewyckoff.org

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