

I can imagine what is happening in your home right now! You are being bombarded with questions:

*“When will school start?”*

*“Can I see my friends?”*

*“Will we have graduation?”*

*“Bowling night. It’s Tuesday. Bowling?”*

*“Will grandma get sick?”*

It’s likely we all have questions – some of our own – but also from those who look to us for answers. You may be a parent at home with your children or you may be a caregiver with a person with an intellectual disability or dementia. Whatever the setting, how do you deal with questions, some that can be asked many, many times a day?

While there are most likely several reasons why people ask the same question, here are a couple of thoughts and then strategies to use that could bring some comfort and resolve.

### **Why do some individuals ask repeated questions?**

1. For some people, we are mentally thinking in words, manipulating ideas and schedules in our mind. We hear a concern and some brains leap into action. A change in schedule is not the end of the world because we have already come up with several reasons “why” and made mental changes or constructed a new schedule in our thoughts within seconds. For some people, either due to age, intellectual reasoning, or personality, that is a challenging skill. In fact, without that tool, one often relies on other cues to bring stability. A schedule, for example, is one powerful way to predict what will happen next, tell what day it is, and structure life. When that schedule is disrupted, a person often begins to get agitated or ask repeated questions. It can happen over positive or negative schedule changes. The rug of predictability just got yanked from under an individual.
2. In other cases, it may be that the person wonders if YOU remember the answer you gave him or her just moments ago. “When will school start again?” You might have told that person that school will start up on a certain date, but 60

seconds later, that individual asks the exact same question. I really believe it's not that the individual has forgotten your answer. I suspect that person wonders if YOU remember that answer. Without the ability to peer into your brain and make a guess of what you are thinking or remember, the only avenue is to ask again (and again and again).

### **Strategies to Try**

1. In the article "[Home Day Ideas](#)," you will find many ways of visually making a schedule or visually marking time. Your words are available for only seconds if you speak them. If there is a wall calendar, a written schedule, or a picture to check, then you can both see the answer and it will stay in focus as long as it's visible to the individual. Check the *Home Day Ideas* for many practical ideas.
2. Since your spoken words are here and gone with no lasting record, consider getting some post-it notes. When a person is asking a question, write down the answer and put it where you can both see it. If that person asks again, simply point to the answer on that piece of paper. You have just made clear what is in your head and have made the conversation visual. (By the way, this often works with people who are non-readers. You can also use pictures or icons on the post-it note).
3. Sometimes you won't know the answer to a question. It can honor that person's thinking by making a special journal of sorts. It can be a notebook or other set of pages that you call "\_\_\_\_\_ 's great questions". When that person asks a question for which the answer is unclear, pull out that journal or notebook and write down the question. Leave space for an answer. Let that person know it's a great question (hence the title of the journal) and that when there is an answer, you will fill it in together. Again, if the person asks another time, show him or her where you wrote it down and that the question is safe in that book until the

answer comes. Writing down someone's questions gives that person the assurance you heard that person and will help come up with that answer ASAP.

4. Some of the questions might truly involve a "why" question that may never have an answer in your "Great Questions" journal. These kinds of "why" questions are often best asked of God, not a parent or caregiver. We give it a large name called "lament." God welcomes our "why" questions. In case you wondered, consider checking out Psalm 13 or 88. If this person asking the question is more musical, there is a great song setting of Psalm 13 by Brian Doerksen. Listen and sing together. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uusiWwIo-C4>
  - Teach that person close to you to bring those questions to God. You can still write it down, but maybe this "Great Question" is one you take from that written journal and pray it together. If and when God supplies that answer, make sure you write it in as well.
  - Consider using a set of tools called "Vertical Habits." There are many words and phrases we say to God. "Why?" is one of them, but so is "Thank you" and "Love you." I have written about Vertical Habits in the book "Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship". It's available on Kindle (\$2.99) or on Amazon (\$10) or from the store at [www.allbelong.org](http://www.allbelong.org). (\$10). Think about using this time at home to establish some of those conversation habits – vertical habits – with God within your home. The last part of the book is filled with ideas for making that conversation with God accessible to people of ALL abilities. Intergenerational settings, family devotions, or settings that include people of varied abilities may find this a helpful tool – especially right now. Build the vocabulary now and continue using it into a lifetime of conversation with God.

- For additional understanding of Vertical Habits, here is a link to the resource page from Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.  
<https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/universal-design-vertical-habits-and-inclusive-worship/>