



## **Tips for Dealing with Dementia Problematic Behaviors *and* Redirection Techniques**

**Agitation**- Individuals with dementia frequently become restless, anxious or upset. To decrease agitation, listen to the person as he or she expresses her frustration to get a clue about what is the trigger. Frustration and overstimulation are all common triggers of agitation. It is also very important to examine your behavior in response to the person. If you are not already doing so, reassure the person that you are there to provide assistance and comfort. If it seems like the person needs something to do, try redirection to an enjoyable activity.

**Aggression**- Aggressive behavior can include shouting, cornering someone, raising a hand to someone, or actually pushing or hitting. Unfortunately, aggression among people with dementia can happen suddenly and seemingly without warning. Most often aggression is triggered by fear. Try to identify what other outside sources triggered the aggression so that the trigger can be eliminated or modified as soon as possible. As difficult as it may be, react by speaking in a calm, reassuring way and focus on the person's feelings. Reduce environment distractions as much as possible, such as loud noises or potentially frightening shadows or movements. The worst thing that you can do is engage in an argument or force the issue that is creating the aggression. The biggest way to stop aggressive behavior is to remove the word "no" from your vocabulary. Redirecting an aggressive person to an enjoyable activity can be remarkably effective.

**Repetition**- People with dementia often repeat a word, question, or action over and over again. This behavior is usually harmless, but it can be unnerving and annoying for those who are caring for the person. Repetitive behavior is usually a sign of insecurity, since people with dementia are

often looking for something comfortable and familiar-something over which they have some degree of control. To address repetition, look for a specific reason for the repetition as well as for the emotion behind it. If the repetition is an action, try turning it into an activity that makes the person feel useful. For example, if the person is constantly fidgeting with his hands, try giving him some socks to sort, towels to fold, or something to dust.

**Hallucinations**- Hallucinations are sensory experiences that seem real but are not. The most common hallucinations are visual and auditory. Because hallucinations seem real to those with dementia, it is not helpful to try to convince the person that she is imagining things. Instead, recognize the person's feelings, reassure the person that you are there to help, and redirect to a pleasant activity. Also consider whether the hallucination is actually bothersome- if it is a "nice" hallucination there may be no benefit in trying to discourage the behavior.

**Suspicion**- Memory loss and disorientation can cause individuals with dementia to perceive situations inaccurately. They may become suspicious of others even those close to them and accuse them of theft, infidelity or other social offenses. As hurtful as it may be to be accused of something you did not do, try not to become offended. Remember that the behavior is caused by a disease that is affecting the person's brain. Try to imagine what it would be like to continuously think your possessions are being taken or hidden because you cannot remember where you put them. Do not try to argue with the person or convince them of your innocence. Instead, share a simple response without a complicated explanation-"I see that you are upset that your purse is missing. I will do my best to find it for you." Another option is to store "back-ups" of commonly misplaced items (e.g., hats, wallets).

**Apathy**- Apathy is a lack of interest in or motivation to engage in activities. While apathy may not seem like a serious behavior problem it is not healthy for someone with dementia to simply sit around passively. Try to find out what may be triggering the apathy as well as what kinds of consequences may be reinforcing it (e.g., being ignored, or not having appropriate choices of pleasant activities.) Even though the person is ill it is important to keep him or her moving and as active as possible in order to maintain physical health and to prevent depression. A small amount of activity is better than none at all.

**Confusion**- Dementia often causes confusion about person, place, and time. In other words, the person may still know who they are but may not recognize others and/or the current location, time, date or even year. An individual with dementia may also become confused about the purpose of objects such as forks, or pens. As frustrating as this can be for caregivers, the best way to respond is to stay calm and provide simple clear positive answers when the person asks for help. For example, if the person seems confused about the purpose of a spoon, simply say "Here is your spoon for eating your soup." You could also calmly show the person how to use the utensil by saying "watch me". It is not appropriate to scold the person or talk to them in a belittling way for becoming confused. There are few possible ways to respond to questions that indicate that someone is confused about where they are. Simple explanations along with photos

and other tangible reminders can help, but it is often more effective to just redirect the person to another activity. Lengthy explanations or reasons are not the way to go. You cannot ever reason with someone who has Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia. A lot of times you can be triggering the response that you are getting because of the questions that you are asking. The deterioration of brain cells caused by Alzheimer's is a particular culprit in behaviors showing poor judgement or errors in thinking. These can contribute to delusions or untrue beliefs. Some of these problems are obvious, such as when someone is hoarding household items, or accuses a family member of stealing something.

**Sundowning**- Sundowning is a term used to describe behaviors that intensify such as increased confusion and agitation in the late afternoon and early evening and is most common with Alzheimer's disease. There are several theories about why sundowning occurs, such as increased fatigue (and as a result, a reduced ability to tolerate stressful situations such as a chaotic dinnertime or a rushed bedtime routine) or increasing confusion due to darkness and shadows. The best way to approach sundowning is to make late afternoons and evenings as simple and relaxing as possible. Reduce distractions, unscheduled activities and behaviors that could be done at a different time of the day and keep rooms well- lit until bedtime.

**Wandering**- One of the more dangerous behaviors among individuals with dementia, wandering may be goal-directed ( the person thinks that he or she is going to a job or going home to a childhood residence) or non-goal directed as when a person wanders aimlessly. To reduce the frequency of wandering, make sure the person has plenty of supervised activity to channel his or her energy. Redirecting the person to another activity can also work. Interestingly, dementia sometimes affects perception in such a way that environmental approaches can help reduce wandering. For instance, a black square painted on the floor in front of a doorway or a simple doormat may be perceived as a hole which can prevent the person from leaving the home.

## **5 Effective Ways to Redirect Someone with Dementia**

### **1. Start with a calm and confident approach**

- ✓ You can redirect more effectively if you are less insistent and less direct.
- ✓ To redirect is to lead, and people prefer to follow someone that they trust and enjoy, and not someone who frightens or shames them.
- ✓ Stick to a calm friendly, and kind tone in your voice and make sure your body language follows suit.
- ✓ A warm smile, eye contact, a light touch, and relaxed posture make the listener more open to your suggestions.

- ✓ You can also use body language to guide a confused person such as an arm around a shoulder and a hand outstretched.

## **2. Ask questions to learn more**

- ✓ Can I get you something?
- ✓ Are you hungry, tired or cold?
- ✓ Can I help you find something?
- ✓ What would you like to do about that?
- ✓ Tell me more about it
- ✓ Are you bored?
- ✓ Are you upset about something?

## **3. Empathize- understand and share the feelings of another without arguing**

- ✓ Avoid arguing or using rational reasoning.
- ✓ Avoid using logic – this makes confused people more defensive.
- ✓ Be reassuring and agreeable - it is ok to go along with a delusion.

## **4. Try bridge phrases- the idea is to engage the person in a conversation that is a slight turn from where they are now**

- ✓ “The mail hasn’t come- that reminds me when Grandpa said he had milk and ice cream delivered to the door. Did you have a milkman?”
- ✓ “I like that story. I have also heard that...”
- ✓ “It is such a nice day. Why don’t we walk to the bird feeder?”
- ✓ “ I know those little men are so upsetting. What I’d really like to know is why they are so quiet! Do you think the cat hears them?”

## **5. Introduce activity alternatives**

- ✓ Introduce a diversion without insisting the reason for it.
- ✓ Boredom often fuels repetitive behaviors- look for engaging activities rather than passive ones like TV watching. Many people with dementia take an interest in things that feel purposeful such as folding towels, and sorting colorful papers.