

10 TIPS FOR DEALING WITH AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN DEMENTIA

1. Be prepared with realistic expectations

- Behavior and aggressive outbursts are normal symptoms of dementia, ensure to respond in a calm and supportive way
- Knowing them before will help in not taking the behavior personally and reduces shock & surprise when it happens.

2. Try to identify the immediate cause or trigger

- Try to understand the reason why the aggressive outburst like fear, frustration or pain started.

For example: Older adults may start yelling at empty areas of the room stating people to get out. Look around and understand the cause such as dim lights during evenings which can cause shadowing and seem like there are people in the corner.

- Once you identify the potential trigger, ensure you sort it out and avoid happening it again. Such as turning on the lights for the above-mentioned example will help the older adult to calm down

Another example: You could have unintentionally approached your older adult from behind and startled them. This can make them feel sensitive and attacked. As a result, they may lash out in what they perceive as self-defense.

3. Rule out pain as the cause of the behavior

- Pain and physical discomfort can trigger aggressive behavior in someone with dementia
- Older adults with dementia may not be able to communicate properly when there is a pain or discomfort. Ensure to check and provide support for their existing conditions such as help in sitting comfortably, help them use toilet, etc.

4. Use a gentle tone and reassuring touch

- When the older adult is upset, try to be as calm as possible to avoid unintentional escalation in the situation. Stay calm, speak slowly, maintain soft voice to reduce everyone's anger and agitation. If needed comfort them with a calming touch and placing your hand on the arm or shoulder.

5. Validate their feelings

- Older adults may become aggressive when they are frustrated, sad, feeling lonely and doesn't know how to express them properly.
- In such scenarios, look for clues to their emotions and try to comfort them. Reassure them that it's ok to feel that way and that you're there to help.

6. Calm the environment

- A noisy or busy environment could also trigger aggressive dementia behavior.
- In such scenarios, look around to see if you can quickly calm the room. Turn down music volume, turn off the TV, and ask other people to leave the room.

7. Play their favorite music

- Music has an amazing effect on mood.
- Sing an old favorite song, play a relaxing classical music, or play a sing-a-long tune to help them calm down faster

8. Shift focus to a different activity

- Older adults may respond aggressively when a current or previous activity has caused agitation or frustration
- Give a minute to vent their feelings and help to shift their attention to different activity that they enjoy

9. Remove yourself from the room

- When nothing works to calm the person, give them some space to calm down and regain balance. This helps to forget their anger.
- Before leaving them alone, ensure the environment is safe, so that they will not hurt themselves when you're not around.

10. Make sure you and your older adult are safe and call for help in emergencies

- In scenarios when older adults are not calming down and becoming danger to you or themselves, make sure you take help from others
- If the situation isn't extreme, call nearby family member or friend with whom the elderly will respond well
- In an emergency, call 911 and emphasize to the operator that the person has dementia, which is causing them to act aggressively. This helps first responders know that the person isn't behaving criminally and needs help to safely calm down
- When the first responder arrives, make sure you clearly inform that the behavior is caused due to dementia or "a brain injury" (if they are unaware of dementia). This helps to treat them more appropriately
- If the older adult needs to be removed from the home, suggest that they may be taken to a hospital or psychiatric institution rather than to a police station.
- Assuming that you don't want to press charges, make it clear that the behavior is because of mental illness or dementia and not a criminal behavior. This will help in avoiding formal charges or unwanted court proceedings.