

Dealing with Agitation and Aggression

Possible causes/contributors:

- Infection or medical illness
- Over-stimulation or under-stimulation
- Discomfort due to pain, hunger, thirst, tight clothing, itchiness, need to use toilet, etc.
- Fear, fatigue, frustration, confusion (when trying to make sense out of a confusing world)
- Prescription drug side effects/interactions
- Changes in the environment or in routine
- Moving to a new residence
- Uncorrected visual or hearing loss
- Perceived or misperceived threats
- Unwelcome assistance with bathing/toileting/clothing changes
- Compelling need to meet past responsibilities such as getting to work or finding someone or something. May be living in the past.
- Compelling need to go "home" where there is a sense of familiarity, freedom, purpose and control and everything is comfortable and makes sense
- Feeling disrespected, unable to exert control and maintain independence
- Poor approach by caregiver (too rapid, rushed, confusing, confrontational, demeaning)

Strategies that can help:

- ❑ *Be alert and aware of warning signs* (e.g., becoming tense, red in the face, clenched fists, rapid searching with eyes, hand waving, muttering, raised voice, restless)
- ❑ *Stay calm.* Don't raise your voice, take offense, or show alarm.
- ❑ *Back off and ask permission.*
- ❑ *Look for the underlying cause and try to alleviate it.*
- ❑ *Remove the person* from the environment or remove whatever is triggering the agitation.
- ❑ *Make the environment calm* (e.g., dim lights, decrease noise)
- ❑ *Use good communication* techniques.
- ❑ *Don't argue or try to reason.* (Remember that dementia affects a person's reasoning abilities.)

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- ❑ *Reassure the person.* Use calming phrases and let the person know you care and are there to help. Validate the person's feelings and demonstrate that you understand.
- ❑ *Redirect.* Use what you know about the person's interests and life story. Some ideas are to ask the person for help, offer a snack or treat, ask the person to come with you, or talk about something the person enjoys.
- ❑ *Find outlets for energy* (e.g., walking or assisting with a simple chore)
- ❑ *Keep things simple & relaxed.* Don't ask the person to do anything complex or stressful until he or she has a chance to calm down.
- ❑ *Involve the person in soothing activities* (e.g., art, music, therapeutic touch, a snack, watching birds, nature walk or viewing, reading familiar passages out loud, petting a dog)
- ❑ *Remove dangerous items* from the environment.
- ❑ *Slow down* as the aggressive person speeds up. Don't make sudden movements.
- ❑ *Never surround or gang up* on an aggressive person. This may prompt a flight-or-fight response if the person feels cornered or overwhelmed. Don't use restraints or force. This may cause more aggressive behavior and possible injury.
- ❑ *Have a medical consult.* Behavior could be due to a change in medical condition or a response to medications.

Possible Things to Say: (first greet the person by name)

"You seem upset."

"What's wrong?"

"I'm so sorry."

"I'm sorry that you're upset."

"I'd be upset, too - if I thought..."

"How can I help?"

"May I help you?"

"What do you want?"

"I know it's hard."

"I'm glad you told me."

"You're safe here."

"Everything is under control."

"I'm on your side."

"I will stay until you feel better."

"I could really use your help."

"Would you help me please?"

"Let's get out of here."

"Let's take a walk."