



The Sojourner Project

...help for the journey

How to Manage Challenging Behaviors Caused by Dementia

- **Patience, understanding and persistence**
 - Remember they are unaware of their disability. They are not being stubborn, or lazy or are doing anything on purpose. Repeat yourself, try to use the same words, a calm tone and simple sentences. Don't argue, reason, confront, explain or defend. Get used to being the cause for all that goes wrong.
- **Validate then navigate**
 - Enter their world and then gently re-orient them to the present moment. Validate their feelings of anger, frustration worry or fear and gently navigate them to a present moment solution.
 - A person with dementia doesn't know that it's their own mind that is betraying them so they will naturally become suspicious and paranoid of everyone around them. So agree then distract or redirect them.
- **Keep it simple and slow things down**
 - Too many people, too much noise or visual stimulation can become overwhelming and frightening. So use simple sentences and keep conversations and external stimulation to a quiet and slow pace.
- **No they don't remember so stop asking!**
 - Always assume they do not know and reply as if it is the first time they asked. Don't argue or defend or remind them when you told them. Take the blame for "forgetting" and redirect them to the present moment
 - Name names - don't wait for your loved one to figure out who you are or who is visiting. "Look who's here, your grandson Mark." Help them say "I didn't recognize you" and not "I have no idea who you are."
- **Yes or no**
 - Be direct and ask simple yes / no and either / or questions. Be careful not to overwhelm them with words, information and options. Give them time to think through what you asked and wait for an answer. If they seem overwhelmed or confused then just decide for them and then let them agree or disagree.
- **Manage the environment**
 - Changes in their physical space can trigger anxiety and escalate some behaviors. Noise, clutter and crowds can be overwhelming and stressful. Limit changes to their home, routine and limit the number of visitors or trips outside. When moving into a residential facility fill their new home with familiar items. Be patient while they adjust and learn to feel safe and comfortable in this strange new space.
- **Go in low not high**
 - When visiting a person dementia be aware of how easily frightened they can feel. Approach from the front and at eye level or lower. Look them in the eye, identify yourself and use a light, gentle touch on the arm or shoulder. Take some steps back if they appear frightened or agitated giving them more time and space.
- **More than words**
 - Language and verbal communication will become frustrating and overwhelming. Conversations will become increasingly difficult to initiate and to especially to follow. When they stop speaking then use hand gestures pointing, touch and eye contact to communicate.
- **Call in the professionals**
 - Occasional help - Use Respite care which is a short-term stay either with family or at a professional facility.
 - Part time - Hire in-home professional caregivers that have experience and training in dementia care.
 - Full time - Ask about the "memory care" facility's staffing levels and dementia specific training and support.
- **Visit the Alzheimer's Association website www.alz.org**
 - Download the free booklets on managing behavior, communication, wandering and other topics.

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The goal is to provide general information so that you can seek out professional assistance from the appropriate subject matter expert
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