

Responsive Behaviours and Dementia

A person's sense of well-being may be influenced by their physical health, intellectual capacity, emotional health, capabilities, the environment and social and cultural background. Changes in any of these factors may affect the person's mood and behaviour and influence how they respond to situations. Someone with dementia may also experience responsive behaviours as a direct result of the changes in the brain caused by the dementia. Certain behaviours may be the person's best attempt to communicate and are often the expression of an unmet need.

Knowing the person and their life history and identifying possible causes for the person's actions or reactions can assist caregivers to find ways to help a person who is experiencing responsive behaviours.

Potential Causes

<p>Poor physical health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pain, illness or fatigue • poor vision or hearing • changing mobility • medications 	<p>Activities not reflective of the person's strength</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boredom • unfamiliar tasks • too complex or too simple tasks
<p>Unsettling environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • too much stimulation (clutter, noise, lights) • changing caregivers or routines • discomfort (temperature, clothing) • being approached in a rushed or stressed manner 	<p>Problems in cognition and communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not recognizing people, places or objects • uncertain about safety • difficulty in expressing thoughts and feelings • difficulty in understanding others
<p>Emotional vulnerability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feelings of frustration, sadness or embarrassment • loss of control or self esteem 	

Prevention

- Be aware of potential triggers and try to avoid them.
- Adapt verbal and nonverbal communication skills to the needs of the person.
- Engage the person in meaningful ways of expressing him or herself through such outlets as familiar activities, support groups and day programs.
- Maintain a daily routine.

Approach to Responsive Behaviours

- Positive physical approach – approach the person from the front, be at eye level, speak to the person before touching him/her, make sure the person has a way out if they become uncomfortable.
- Minimize stimulation – only one person should approach in a calm manner using simple statements or directions. Eliminate other noise in the room.
- Orient the person to the topic or to what you are about to do.
- Keep the focus away from the behaviour or its cause by changing the subject or redirecting the person to a pleasant or familiar activity.
- If the person says no, take a deep breath, walk away and come back in two or three minutes. Try again as if it were the first time.
- If there's imminent danger, protect yourself by leaving the room and call for help.

Additional Considerations

- Always acknowledge how the person is feeling.
- Keep your family and friends engaged – they can help to prevent the triggers and give support when situations become difficult.
- Keep your doctor or healthcare provider informed of changing behaviours as this can help them to make a proper assessment and identify treatment options.
- Episodes of emotional reactions can leave a caregiver with feelings of guilt, remorse or sadness. It may help to talk to someone who can listen and provide advice. Joining a support group may be helpful. Call the Alzheimer Society of Manitoba for information and support and to learn about support groups meeting in your area.