

FACULTY GUIDE

Supplemental Module 5

Addressing Behaviors in Dementia

December 2017

DISCLAIMER: Some of the views expressed in this presentation module are solely the opinions of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Health Resources and Services Administration, nor does mention of the department or agency names imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.



Module 5: Addressing Behaviors in Dementia

Slide 1:

Addressing Behaviors in Dementia: This talk is intended to help caregivers identify ways to prevent and manage behavioral issues in persons living with dementia. It is part of a series of talks that was developed under a contract from the Health Resources and Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services. This work was funded by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Women's Health.

Slide 2:

This presentation will help you:

- recognize behavioral symptoms such as repetitive questioning, agitation, or wandering;
- understand how behaviors change during the course of dementia and how their responses also should change; and
- learn ways to manage and prevent behavioral symptoms.

Slide 3:

Behavioral symptoms are inappropriate behaviors that a person living with dementia exhibits. These behaviors differ from the way the person living with dementia would have acted before the memory loss.

Dementia kills brain cells that control behaviors. Unmet needs such as pain, sleep problems, fear, or boredom can also lead to behavioral problems.

- For example, persons living with dementia who have bladder infections might not complain of pain, but instead may act inappropriately.
- Or, an unfamiliar place can cause fear which results in an inappropriate behavior.

Overseeing behavioral symptoms is frustrating for a caregiver. However, there are ways that caregivers can cope with behavioral symptoms. There is no magic drugs for fixing these behaviors. The drugs used for treating behavioral problems often have serious side effects and are very expensive. For these reasons, most experts recommend finding other ways to stop or change the behaviors.

This presentation looks at ways to help you manage challenging behaviors and to prevent them from happening again.

There are many ideas to help you can be found on the National Institute on Aging/Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center website About Alzheimer's disease: Caregiving at <https://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/caregiving>

Slide 4:

In the earlier stages of dementia, people living with dementia commonly report problems with short-term memory. They may repeat questions more than they used to, have difficulty remembering recent chats, and express frustration and complaints related to memory. Personality and behavioral changes become more apparent.

Module 5: Addressing Behaviors in Dementia

Persons living with dementia may experience more boredom and lose interest in activities they once enjoyed. Depression is a common reaction when they become aware of their disease and its effects.

Slide 5:

There are several ways to prevent or respond to early-stage behaviors.

Some ideas for managing behaviors include establishing a routine and de-cluttering the living area; writing notes to help jog memories; and using clocks, calendars, or photographs to create calm. Positive reinforcement is reassuring. When responding to frustration, use a calm tone and speak words of comfort. Listen to the concerns of the person living with memory loss, and show understanding.

Do not test their memory as doing so may increase frustration or boredom because of a feeling of failure. Ask a provider to check the person living with dementia for depression and, if it is present, get it treated with medication and/or psychotherapy.

Slide 6:

As early-stage dementia progresses to a moderate-stage, the person living with dementia may begin to experience more intense or new symptoms, such as feelings of worthlessness or sadness.

Persons living with moderate-stage dementia may wander and get lost. Sleep problems also become more common, along with increased restlessness, worry and an inability to calm down. Agitation may sometimes cause the person living with dementia to become verbally or physically violent.

Slide 7:

Caregivers can take many actions to prevent or respond to new behaviors during the moderate stage of dementia.

In addition to removing clutter, displaying well-loved objects and offering reassurance, caregivers can break tasks into smaller, easy-to-follow steps to develop positive feelings and a sense of accomplishment.

Caregivers can offer assistance with brief, simple answers and forgive minor oversights. Offering comfort and responding to feelings rather than actions can help caregivers address a cause of the behaviors.

Caregivers can also seek home and community-based services to assist them with providing personal care and home delivered meals. They can also participate in support groups, through the Alzheimer's Association and other educational programs, to learn more about coping with challenging behaviors.

Slide 8:

People living with later-stage dementia may begin to experience odd behaviors with greater frequency and intensity than in the earlier stages of dementia.

- For example, they may have difficulty finding everyday words or following conversations and simple instructions.
- They may talk constantly but not do well in everyday chats.
- Increased agitation and delusional thoughts may also occur during this stage of dementia.

Module 5: Addressing Behaviors in Dementia

- There may be changes in eating and sleeping habits as well.

Slide 9:

Gestures, spoken sounds and facial expressions like wincing may indicate pain or discomfort, and may explain behaviors in late-stage dementia. Identify sources of pain when the behaviors are present. Distract the person with a favorite snack, object, or activity in order to stop the behavior. Use gentle hugging or touching to help the person relax.

Keeping things simple in later stage dementia is also important; asking or saying one thing at a time is an example.

When responding to behaviors, focus on the feelings and respond with words of comfort and reassurance to avoid making the behaviors worse. Holding hands, touching, hugging and praise will get the person living with dementia to respond positively. Asking general questions about the person's distant past may be another way to connect.

Slide 10:

While it may be difficult, caregivers cannot take challenging behaviors personally. Focus on feelings, not facts. For example, although not correcting or confronting a person living with dementia about a behavior that embarrasses you will not be easy, if you can ignore it, the behavior may subside. Providing a safe space for the person living with dementia to behave as they choose is important, if possible.

You can try new approaches via Alzheimers.net:

<http://www.alzheimers.net/1-6-15-new-approaches-difficult-behaviors>

Slide 11:

When speaking with a person living with dementia, it is a good idea to use simple words and sentences, and to speak quietly, slowly, distinctly and in a reassuring tone. People with memory loss understand body language. Facial expressions, tone of voice and physical touch all show your feelings of affection.

If the person is struggling for an answer, you can suggest possible words, but limit distractions and noise. Getting the attention of the person living with dementia by addressing her/him by name, identifying yourself by name and relationship, and touching are all methods for improving contact.

Maintain eye contact at the level of the person living with dementia. A change in ability to communicate may signal a health problem and should prompt you to contact the health care team for advice.

Slide 12:

A simple and clean living area creates a safe, calm and predictable environment for the person living with dementia.

- Remove clutter and clear pathways.
- Make sure floors provide good traction for walking or pacing and place locks out of the normal line of sight or install double locks.
- Remove valuable items and create a special place for the person living with dementia to act freely or sort through things safely.

Module 5: Addressing Behaviors in Dementia

- Remove mirrors and keep furniture in the same place.
- To maintain a safe space, avoid violent or loud television programs, and minimize large family get-togethers. Consider inviting fewer people and prepare the person living with dementia ahead of time. During the holidays, simplify social gatherings by hosting a potluck instead of a large meal, and choose a few items to decorate one room instead of decorating the whole house.

Slide 13:

Including persons living with dementia in activities to make them feel like an important part of the household can also help provide a sense of accomplishment. They can still enjoy activities, especially if they learned them years ago. Choose simple activities that make them happy such as setting the table for breakfast. Make sure that the person's physical health allows him/her to enjoy the activity.

Slide 14:

Activities should bring joy, not anxiety. Certain activities work better during particular times of the day than others.

As the dementia progresses, it may make sense to do more repetitive tasks that you can do together. Do keep in mind that the person living with dementia will eventually take a less active role in these activities.

Slide 15:

Most persons living with dementia still want to be active but may not be able to begin or complete a task. Instruct the individual using easy-to-follow steps but do not expect the person living with dementia to finish the activity or always do it the same way.

One story shows how involving a person with dementia in activities can manage their behavior. A man living with dementia in a nursing home regularly wandered off. A custodian learned that the man used to be an engineer and built him a large wooden board with gadgets, ropes, dials, and other moving knobs. The care staff found that the man no longer engaged in wandering because he enjoyed working on the board.

As this story illustrates, managing challenging behaviors with other activities is trial and error but can be helpful.

Slide 16:

Problem-solving can help caregivers manage behaviors of a person living with dementia.

- First, make a list of behaviors that are problematic. It may help to use a "daily problem guide" for a week or more to collect the information.
- Second, use the list to think of solutions, noting that the best solutions may take time, and implement them.
- Using this method, even a failure can reveal new ways to manage a challenging behavior.

Slide 17:

Module 5: Addressing Behaviors in Dementia

There are now many apps and online programs specifically for caregivers.

Two places to begin your search are the National Institute on Aging website at <https://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers> and the Alzheimer's Association website at <http://www.alz.org/care/> (then click on Stages & Behaviors near the top of the page).

Slide 18:

In conclusion, it is important to figure out why behaviors occur in persons living with dementia and to remember that these behaviors can change or get worse during the different stages of dementia.

Because of this, you should be aware of different approaches and strategies to prevent or respond to these behaviors throughout the course of a person's memory loss.