

Strategies for Behavioral Expressions

Life is demanding for those living with dementia and it can be equally demanding for their care partners. With changes in memory and thinking, the person living with dementia struggles to plan and carry out many usual daily activities and can have difficulty interpreting their world (e.g. understanding the current pandemic and restrictions). Some individuals may even begin to believe things that are untrue (called delusions) or see things that are not there (called hallucinations) As a result of their frustrations and inability to fully communicate their needs and concerns, it is not uncommon for care partners to witness unwanted behaviors. The added stress the person is feeling cannot be communicated so their behaviors are trying to “express” what it is they need or feel.

You might feel like the target when these behavioral expressions occur. Remember, you are the one who is there in the line of fire. However, rather than taking it personally, take a breath and consider these strategies:

- **Be aware of your emotions** and body language before you respond. People living with dementia have very strong “emotional memory.” Your facial expressions and voice tone will tell them if you are happy, anxious, frustrated, angry, etc. Expect that your loved one will mirror what he/she sees as you communicate. You are not a saint, and it is almost impossible to put on a happy face 24/7 – instead, take a breath (or walk away) before you respond in a negative way!
- **Don’t argue** as you will lose the battle. Remember your loved one is really trying to do the best he/she can throughout the day. Their brain disease is making their reality change. Don’t make him join your world – you need to join his. Take a breath and go with the flow.
- **Recognize fatigue** - Your loved one’s brain gets tired faster than in the past. This can result in cranky, unfiltered, or confused behavioral expressions. Time for some scheduled rest periods throughout the day. This may or may not include a nap. Just listening to music or leafing through a magazine or paper can provide some much-needed down time.
- **Keep a routine.** Your loved one has lost the ability to manage time and the routine will provide the structure and predictability that is needed. The time is not important rather, the order in which you do things each day can provide comfort.
- **Help your loved one find meaning.** We all need to have something to do that fills our time and even those with advanced dementia need to find a way to connect to the world. Repetitive tasks and activities work as their “rapid forgetting” allows for something to be done over and over. Find those tasks or activities that work. Invite her to join you and then turn the task or activity over to her as you ease your way out of the room.
- **Recognize your limits.** Caregiving is tough when you are on duty 24/7. It is okay to ask for help. Be specific to those around you who can help. What do you need for how long and when? Even during COVID, having a daughter call her mom everyday and keeping her occupied on the phone for 30 minutes might give you a short reprieve. Ask your daughter to help and let her know how it is helping YOU!

- **If you can't manage** the behavioral expressions or you see that they are escalating, it is time to call your healthcare provider for an appointment. Don't think that you need to wait for your 6 month follow up appointment. You need help NOW.

One of the greatest benefits of Memory Café is joining together as a group and problem-solving behavioral expressions. We learn together and support one another. Even with the physical distance imposed on us during this pandemic, it is important that we don't go at it alone.

A reminder for those wishing to talk to someone, please feel free to reach out to our amazing DFT Memory Cafe Support group leaders. You can either call or email to connect with them:

- Susie Peck – susiepeck22@yahoo.com (505) 977-7677
- Cindy O'Connell – cindyocindy5@hotmail.com (520) 730-3132
- For additional support and resources call the Alzheimer Association 24/7 Helpline: 800 272-3900 <https://alz.org/help-support/resources/helpline>
- Free Counseling- Tempe residents can receive free stress management counseling through CARE 7's licensed counselors and social workers as well as counseling interns from Arizona State University. Up to three sessions are available focusing on understanding stress, developing coping skills and finding hopeful solutions to manage life in the time of coronavirus. **Call CARE 7 at 350-8004** to request counseling and undergo a brief screening.

Stay Well,

Your Tempe Memory Care Team