THE DUBIN CENTER
Where no one faces dementia alone.

CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

This tips sheet aims to provider caregivers a general guide on how to handle and respond to challenging behaviors.

1 Why do behaviors occur?

Behaviors are usually a response to unmet needs, such as pain, fear, confusion, frustration, fatigue, or overstimulation. When someone can't express themselves clearly, behavior becomes their way of communicating.

2 Pause before you react.

Take a breath before responding. A calm pause helps prevent escalation and gives you time to think about what the behavior might be communicating.

3 Try Simple, Supportive Strategies

Small adjustments can make a big difference

- Using a calm, steady voice
- Offering simple choices ("Would you like to sit or walk?")
- Reducing noise, clutter, or crowds
- Redirecting attention to a familiar or comforting activity

4 Focus on safety, not control

The goal is to keep everyone safe, not to "win" or force compliance. Let go of what isn't essential in the moment and prioritize de-escalation.

Keep in mind to check on basic needs: hunger, pain, toileting, rest.

5 Don't take it personally

Harsh words, anger, or resistance are not about you. They are symptoms of stress, illness, or unmet needs, not a reflection of your care, effort, or relationship.

6 Notice patterns

Pay attention to when behaviors happen. Triggers might include certain times of day, environments, activities, or transitions. Recognizing patterns helps you prevent future challenges.

7 When to ask for help

Reaching out to healthcare providers, support staff, or caregiver support groups is **a sign of strength,** not failure.

Ask for help when:

- Behaviors become unsafe or unmanageable
- You feel overwhelmed, burned out, or unsure what to do next
- Strategies aren't working despite consistent effort

For more information, resources, or support- please call and schedule a consultation with a social worker.

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