

Responsive Behaviour

What Does it Mean?

The term “responsive” behaviour places the reasons/triggers for the behaviour *outside* of the person rather than *within* the person.

LTC settings can be overwhelming, unfamiliar and confusing for persons with dementia, which can lead to a specific response.

Whatever a person with dementia does, it is the best that he/she can do at that time and based on what they perceive as their reality.



Agitation

Possible causes or triggers:

- Environmental changes – living arrangements, change in caregiver
- Fear – bathing, changing clothes
- Dehydration
- Fatigue

Strategies:

- Redirect person’s attention, distraction
- Remain calm and positive
- Use visual and verbal cues
- Simplify tasks and routines

Wandering

Possible causes or triggers:

- Stress and anxiety
- Restlessness to recognize familiar people, places, objects
- Desire to fulfill former obligations (going to work, caring for family)
- Fear

Strategies:

- Encourage movement and exercise to reduce anxiety
- Disguise doors, use signage (do not enter, stop signs)
- Put visual reminders (coat, hat) out of sight
- Involve resident in productive daily activities (setting the table, watering plants, dusting, cleaning residents’ eyeglasses)

Sexual Behaviours

Possible causes or triggers:

- Impaired impulse control
- Disinhibition
- Disrobing – clothing is too tight, an overheated room, the need to use the washroom, disorientation in time and space

Strategies:

- Try other activities as a form of distraction – ones that suggest comfort (cuddling a pet, looking at family photos), keep idle hands busy (folding, sorting, holding stress balls)
- Consider changing wardrobe – blouses that have closure at the back instead of the front, using suspenders for those who often take off their pants
- Consistent approach used by all staff (“Hands to yourself please”)

Responsive behaviours are triggered by an unmet need – a response to something frustrating, frightening or confusing in the person’s environment.

Sundowning

Possible causes or triggers:

- End of the day exhaustion (mental and physical)
- Reduced lighting and increased shadows
- Boredom, sleeping a lot during the day, lack of routine
- Wanting to go home
- Disorientation
- Upset in the internal clock – mix up between day and night

Strategies:

- Schedule calming activities for time of day when agitation usually occurs
- Monitor diet – restrict sweets and avoid caffeine at night
- Ensure adequate lighting
- Provide items of comfort – favourite pillow/blanket
- Plan and encourage activities as much as possible during the day
- Provide reassurance, redirect and reminisce as a distraction

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