

How to Deal with Difficult behaviors

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For those who care for a person with dementia, it is no rare that the person we are taking care of, they suddenly responds in way that is no common in a normal person. It is then when adverse circumstances aroused. The wife, the spouse, the son, the person who is taking care of the one with dementia, wanted to help them and ask them, but there is no way to do it, as family members do not know how to face this situation.

People want them to behave properly and told them that certain things are not right to do, however, they take all of this as a severe criticism and respond with a more aggressive manners. It is when inappropriate behaviors arise and we do not find or see a logical explanation of why it happens. However, these kind of misconducts are presented. The person with dementia start to shout, beat, tamper. In a few words, they react violently.

This series of behaviours: reacting violently and angrily, screaming, crying, laughing inappropriately and without any apparent cause is what we call "catastrophic reactions". A catastrophic reaction is the first clue through which family members begin to realize that something is happening, that something wrong and that dementia has made its appearance.

Dealing with such types of behaviours can be very difficult to face and the only way to deal with it is through trial and error. Let us remember that this type of behaviour is not deliberate; the person actually is out of control, most of the time they are frightened at their own reaction.

Although perhaps the family get not acquainted, what the person with dementia needs, is security. This is why is so true and very important to provide a pleasant and adequate environment, which helps a lot; although we have also to agree and to know, that there are extremely difficult tasks that we must face when caring for a patient of this nature. For example, tasks such as helping to bathe, dress, feed, could be risky and difficult to overcome.

For the person with dementia, all these activities, tasks that are very complicated, all of which leads to despair and react in a negative way. That is why it is advisable to help him or help her, without pressing them, to try as far as possible to guide them do things for themselves, maintaining to a high degree his dignity and self-esteem.

Most common concerns that caregivers express

Some of the most common concerns among family members and caregivers are:

- Why does he blame all at me and split it on my faces if all I do is try to help him?
- Why do sometimes I feel like he hates me?
- Did I inadvertently did something wrong to make him angry or react in this way?

All these reactions are very normal. It is logical that we get in despair and do not understand too much of what is happening. What is very important is that we realize that while the patient gets angry and turns against us, either through insults, blows or swipes, this aggression is directed against us, the caregivers, because we are the closest person to them. However, we should never think that this is a deliberate or calculated personal attack to us.

Causes of catastrophic reactions

- Tension caused by harassment, pressure or excessive demands in certain situations.
- Frustration caused by ambivalent messages or bad interpretations.
- Some other type of unrest or underlying illness.

Aggressive behavior can come at any time when you less expect it. This may make us feel bad and not know what to do or how to react to those situations.

Experts recommend having a book or diary where we can keep track of when and how these catastrophic reactions are presented. In this way, one can remember what happened in certain circumstance and try to avoid repeating that bitter experience. Take into account that each person has his own world and that the people with dementia can react differently to the same situation and stimulus.

Try to minimize the tension

In order to avoid such catastrophic reactions, it is recommended to keep calm, be surrounded by a calm and tension-free environment, one in which the person with dementia can follow a certain type of routine that is known to him/her.

- Approach the person little by little and talk slowly, without raising the tone of voice
- Smile and try to avoid conveying your own fears or anxiety.
- Take note that the person will not always be able to recognize you: try to give them some information that can help them, such as your name and your relationship with them.
- Try to make eye contact and address them by name; Touching them gently can work quite well and be a way to reassure them, but be aware that for some people this may not like it.
- Speak clearly and use very simple and short sentences, giving you enough time to respond.
- Try asking questions that only require a “yes” or “no” as an answer.
- Try with gestures and signs what you are trying to say.
- Avoid all types of noise and distractions that only disturb him.
- Try to focus on those skills that are within their abilities.
- Give a choice of something within a limited number of possibilities, this will prevent they get anxious and not knowing what to choose.
- Divide tasks into simple steps that do not overwhelm them.
- If it is difficult for you to understand what the person is trying to tell you, try to focus on a word or phrase that makes sense, or simply respond to the feelings they are trying to express.
- It is often necessary that you separate yourself from the situation or the conflict until the person has calmed down.

Modifying or get adapted to the environment

People with dementia problems often get really upset if they find themselves in a strange situation or before a group of unknown people, as this can cause them distress and confusion. For many people this can be very simple and can make no sense at all,

but people who are ill the frustration that this causes can be enough reason to provoke a reaction that we do not want to be presented. Be aware of what types of situations lead to unwanted behaviors and try to avoid them.

- Try to get the person to do things when they are at their best and you see that they are not tired.
- Try to keep a diary where you point out all those good and bad things that happen, taking note under what circumstances they usually occur.
- Placing labels or drawings on furniture or objects can help identify or locate them.
- Try to avoid any kind of frustration by adapting to the problem: for example, if the person is restless and wants to get up and walk around the house, allowing the person to do it, that will serve him as exercise and this will calm him.
- Close those areas of the house where you think there may be problems.
- Simplify as much as possible the environment: for example, put only the necessary cutlery on the table at the time of meals.
- Make the person use other senses such as touch and smell.
- Remember that many of the behavioural problems occur when there has been a change in your environment, such as having changed of home or admitted in a geriatric residence.

The distraction

- Many of these types of explosions or bursts can be avoided beforehand, especially, when you notice the person a little tense or agitated in advance and you can take some action. It is when we must act treating to calm and comfort her, giving them affection and sense of safety.
- Try first to respond to feelings of anger by trying to appease and soothe the person with great calmness and gentleness.
- Try to distract it and, alternately, attempt to ignore this type of start-up by dealing with other things yourself.

Things to avoid

- Try not to argue with the person when they are upset, since they no longer have the ability to reason or be logical in their approaches. Instead, try to keep your energy and stay calm.
- Try not to get angry as this can make the situation worse.
- Try not to walk after the person to be watching, all this annoys them.
- Never rebuke or punish the person, even if their behaviour is mad, unreasonable or out of mind; remember that they are not responsible for what they do.

- Try to focus not on what the person cannot do, but rather on those positive things you can still achieve.
- Try not to laugh, mock, or be sarcastic.
- Try not to ask questions that require memory use.
- Try not to talk about the person in your presence.
- Try not to take things to the chest or in a personal way.
- Try not to push or rush the person.
- Never force or retain the person because this will simply increase your restlessness and distress.
- Never jeopardize your own safety: if you think things have gone out of control and you see danger, ask a family member, neighbour, or other support group for help. If you think the situation is more serious, call your doctor or the police.

Violence and aggression

A person with dementia can get violent in a few seconds. Their aggression can be not only verbal, but physical; and not only against who are taking care of them, but only against themselves. Coming not only to blows, but also to the destruction of furniture and objects with which they can cause harm to themselves, like causing harm to others.

Usually this physical violence happens when someone tries to approach them. This is because this is seen by the person with dementia as an aggression towards his person. In these cases try to calm down and not show your fear or fear. Try to understand that even if aggression is toward you, this should not be seen as a personal attack.

Violence could be caused by

- **Defensive behavior:** A person with dementia may feel humiliated and frustrated when placed in an uncomfortable situation, where they have to accept help, especially in tasks that are considered intimate such as having to be bathed or helped to do their basic needs. This is because it means losing their independence and privacy, all of which can bring them to react angrily and violently to feel that they can no longer do all those things they used to do for themselves.
- **Misunderstandings:** As the disease progresses, certain details arise in which the person is disoriented and confused. The patient can accuse others of stealing from him in a desperate attempt to give a sense or justification to what is happening to them and a denial to accept reality, as if that they are forgetting things, not being able to remember

where they have placed objects they have lost and many other details. Fear. The person is unable to recognize people or places, which can scare them or even cause them to panic. Seeing a lot of people or being in the middle of a lot of noise can be negative detonators. The same can happen if someone comes to approach suddenly behind or back, which may also be the cause of a hostile reaction.

- **Routine changes:** Examples of this could be the presence of many people, a special event, noises or a lot of new activity around them.
- **Seek attention:** Just as children make their tantrums to draw attention, so the demented can act impulsively in order to try to imply they need help, even if they do not know how to ask or express.
- **Pain and boredom:** Often factors such as pain, boredom or lack of activity translate into negative behaviors, causing anger, aggression or agitation, especially if the person is unable to communicate such difficulties verbally.
- **Attempts to control behaviors:** That we as caregivers want to control behaviors like wandering can cause catastrophic reactions. Examples of this can be when you say to them: "Sit down, don't stop, stay there, be quiet..."

Facing aggressive behaviors

Preventive measures

- Try to perform all those tasks that you feel is difficult just when the person is at their best.
- Try not to push the person. Take into account its limitations and do not expect much from it.
- Encourage as much independence as possible so that the person is self-worth, as much as possible.
- Avoid confrontations that lead to nothing, look for alternatives and ask for suggestions.
- Offer help, but do it with tact.
- Encourage her and praise him for the things you have done well, but never criticize you.
- Try to warn in advance signs such as anxiety or agitation (restlessness, nervousness, refusal to do things).
- Exercise can be a very useful preventative measure.
- If you suspect that you are sick, because you see that you complain or have pain, then it would be very convenient for

you to consult your doctor. Many times these outbursts of anger may be caused by an infection, pain, or ailment that can be remedied.

- Remember that not all preventative measures will always work the same way. Do not blame yourself that suddenly emerges again some kind of aggression, try rather to take things calmly and if possible with a sufficient dose of sense of humor.

Strategies

- Do not try to push, restrict, or corral the person, nor do you think about coming back and attempting any kind of physical contact. It is better to leave them alone until they have calmed themselves.
- In case of difficulty, seek help from a family member, friend, or neighbor.
- Try not to take things too hard or personally.
- Talk to talk to him in a very voice, try to distract him.
- Try not to lift the voice tone.
- Do not cause them to laugh or mocking.
- Never try to punish them, as they do not know what they are doing.
- Try not to show fear or fear.
- Look for other means that you believe may be effective.
- Try to remain calm and to some extent distant, so as not to be involved in sterile arguments; In difficult cases, take a deep breath and count, perhaps not only up to ten, but up to twenty or even one hundred. You will see that it works.
- Trying to convince yourself that you are more than facing a person, you are facing an illness.
- If you lose your patience, do not feel bad or feel guilty. Try to discuss it with a friend, support group partner, or a professional who can help.
- If the incidents of aggression persist, consult your doctor or geriatrician. He will probably be able to suggest something else, whether it can be a new medical evaluation or some kind of tranquilizer medication.

Take care of yourself

It is logical that this kind of sudden reactions will leave you as a caregiver, exhausted, angry, courageous and even trembling and intricate with rage. It is essential that you seek help from either a relative, a friend, a member of your support group or a health professional.

- Try to look for some other kind of help, such as someone to help you with chores such as housekeeping, laundry, and someone to help you in the care of the sick, whether it is a day or two, or even for a few hours.
- Remember that all those feelings of anguish, frustration, guilt, exhaustion and despair are very normal.
- However, if you believe you are losing control of yourself and the situation, do not hesitate to call someone else from the support group you belong to or the nearest Alzheimer's association to your location, where they will gladly try to provide support to you.

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