

# Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS”

## Better Communication

### When the Person in Your Care is Angry

It can be frustrating when working hard to care for someone who argues, refuses to follow directions, and is even verbally abusive. Sometimes these are the behaviors that accompany diseases such as Alzheimer's (AD). Other times, the person is frustrated by feeling sick or without control over many aspects of his life, and takes these frustrations out on those around him, especially the caregiver. Remember, he is upset about the *situation*, not you.



### Encourage Cooperation

First, make sure he *understands* what you are asking. He may be confused, especially in cases of dementia, or he may be feeling ill and simply *unable* to respond quickly.

**Make sure he is comfortable and not sick**—He may be confused, over-stimulated, or in physical pain.

**Be a listener**—Take time to ask the person in your care how he is doing. Sometimes combative behavior is a symptom of a deeper issue. For example, a person may refuse to be bathed because he is feeling modest. Or he may refuse to eat in response to a sense of loss of control. Giving the person choices can make him more likely to cooperate.

**Be patient**—Your schedule may be overwhelming, but the person in your care is on his own schedule. Allow more

time than usual for simple tasks. Too many activities at once can provoke a reaction because the person feels overwhelmed.

**Remain calm.** Seeing you calm may help calm him down.

**When the person is upset, delay the personal care if possible.** Can the task you are attempting be put off until the person is calmer?

**Do not contradict his reality.** Affirm his feelings. Say, “I see you are angry.” If he believes something to be true, do not disagree, unless it poses a physical threat.

**Track the behavior.** Keep notes on times of day, frequency, or type of behavior problem.

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## Tips on Changing What YOU Do

You may not be able to control the other person's behavior, but you can control your own. Here's how to appear less *confrontational* to the person who is agitated:

**Stand to the side of him** or at eye level rather than towering over him—especially if there are several people tending to him at once.

**Don't expect an immediate response.** Allow extra time.

**Keep the room calm.** Turn off the TV and radio.

**Speak clearly and slowly.** Repeat softly what is necessary.

## Handling Angry Outbursts or Uncooperative Behavior

First, try to diffuse the anger. There are several ways to do this. You will have to experiment to see what works best with the person in your care.

You can try:

**Humor**—Making light of the situation, but *not* the person.

**Empathy**—"I see how upset you are and I understand."

**Changing the Subject**—Address what he is saying briefly and then move on to a different topic.

**Take a Break**—Tell the person you have a task to take care of in another room and that you'll discuss the issue in a little while. This will give him time to cool down and you a chance to take some deep breaths to get centered again.

### NOTE

Older people, especially those with AD, are very sensitive to your *mood and body language*. Use eye contact, lean forward with interest, and keep a relaxed expression.

## Communication Is Not Just Speaking

As much as 90% of our communication is non-verbal. When the person in your care can no longer communicate with words, you can communicate that you care about him by the *tone* of your voice. A hug speaks more clearly than words. Music and dancing can also be a kind of communication. People with AD may be able to sing a song with you, even though they can no longer speak. Dancing together can communicate your affection for each other.

## Salty Language

Sometimes people with AD use salty language, which they never would have used before they became ill. Don't be offended. It is the disease speaking. Try to remind yourself that these embarrassing behaviors are symptoms of the illness. If the person with AD understood what he was doing, he wouldn't do it.

### Taking Care of Yourself—Feeling Victimized in Alzheimer’s Care

It is easy to feel victimized if you are caught up in the problems caused by someone else’s illness. One natural response is anger. Unleashing anger on the person in your care may make you feel guilty; think of it as a message to yourself that you need more respite or support. Try these outlets:

- Caregiver support groups provide a place where you can freely express your feelings. Members will often offer effective, real-world solutions.
- Make an appointment with a therapist or family counselor or clergy.
- Keep a journal of your feelings.
- Separate the person from the condition. The illness, not the person in your care, is responsible for the difficulties and challenges that you both are facing.

Source: *The Comfort of Home for Alzheimer’s Disease: A Guide for Caregivers*



### Live Life Laughing!

I never use my turn signal because it’s nobody’s business where I’m going.



### Inspiration

Listen with your heart, because you can’t believe your ears.

~Nathan Lane

### Don’t Fall – Be Safe Eyeglasses

Be sure the eyeglass prescription is current and the person in your care is using the glasses as advised by their eye doctor. Bifocals can be problematic on stairs, so it’s important to be cautious.

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## ***SAFETY TIPS*—A Safe Home Environment for Alzheimer's**

Creating a safe home environment for a person with Alzheimer's disease requires changes that would be made for any older person. You should also consider any physical or mental disabilities he or she has that are unique to Alzheimer's disease and plan ahead for *future* difficulties.

The environment should be suitable or right for the symptoms of the disease, which include—

- Memory loss
- Confusion about where he is
- Confusion about how to get to or find a particular room
- Decreased judgment
- Tendency to wander
- Poor impulse control
- Changes in vision, hearing, depth perception
- Sensitivity to changes in temperature

NEXT ISSUE... STANDARD PRECAUTIONS AND THE ZIKA VIRUS

# Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

## Q U I C K Q U I Z

To help diffuse a situation so that it doesn't become a problem, it is important to learn how to communicate with someone who is angry. Read the issue and answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Standing over a person while talking to him can make you appear confrontational.  
T F
2. As much as 90% of our communication is non-verbal.  
T F
3. It is not important to allow extra time for an older person to do simple tasks.  
T F
4. Sometimes simply listening to how someone *feels* is enough to diffuse their anger.  
T F
5. Having the TV and radio on loud will calm an agitated person.  
T F
6. When the person in your care is uncooperative, first make sure he understands what you are asking him to do.  
T F
7. If the person in your care becomes agitated often, it is helpful to keep notes on times of day, frequency, or type of behavior to try to determine what causes it.  
T F
8. Use humor by making light of the situation or the person.  
T F
9. Difficult behavior may be related to problems with digesting food, sleeping, or simply wanting privacy.  
T F
10. Too many activities at once can provoke a reaction because the person feels overwhelmed.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_