

The Empowered Caregiver  
**Responding to  
Dementia-Related  
Behaviors**

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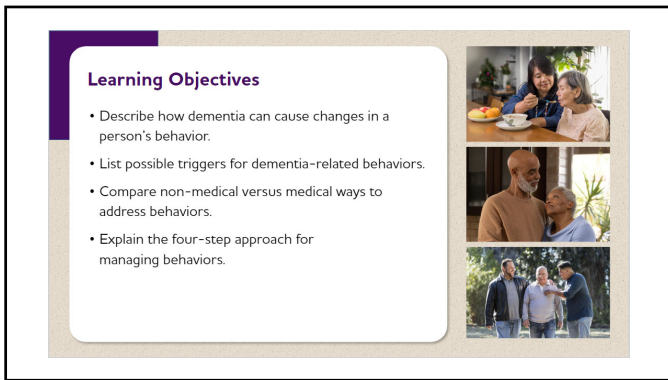
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**Learning Objectives**

- Describe how dementia can cause changes in a person's behavior.
- List possible triggers for dementia-related behaviors.
- Compare non-medical versus medical ways to address behaviors.
- Explain the four-step approach for managing behaviors.

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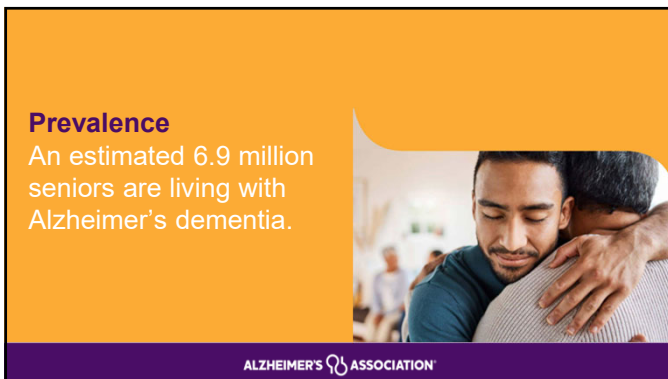
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**Prevalence**  
An estimated 6.9 million seniors are living with Alzheimer's dementia.

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**DEMENTIA:**

An umbrella term for loss of memory and other thinking abilities severe enough to interfere with daily life

**Types of Dementia**

- Alzheimer's
- Vascular
- Lewy body
- Frontotemporal
- Other, including Huntington's
- Mixed dementia: dementia from more than one cause

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**Communication changes are often the earliest sign of dementia.**

Changes vary from person to person, but common ones include:

- Difficulty finding the right words.
- Repeating familiar words, phrases and stories.
- Describing an item when they can't think of the word for it.
- Forgetting what they were talking about in the middle of a sentence.
- Difficulty organizing words in a way that makes sense.
- Going back to speaking in their native language.
- Speaking less often.
- Using hand gestures more than speaking.

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**Using a Person-Centered Approach to Communication**

- A person-centered approach means you use what you know about the person and adjust how you care for them and communicate with them based on their unique abilities and preferences.
- This approach can help you communicate with someone living with dementia.

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**Applying a Person-Centered Approach to Communication**

**1** Treat them with respect and dignity.

  
Tips

- Use knowledge of the person's likes, dislikes and communication preferences.
- Call the person by their preferred name.
- Avoid talking about the person as if they are not there.
- Avoid correcting them.
- Validate their feelings.

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**Applying a Person-Centered Approach to Communication**

**2** Include the person living with dementia in conversations.

  
Tips

- Talk directly to the person.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Use a calm tone of voice.
- Acknowledge what the person says.
- Help them engage in conversations that are meaningful to them.
- Have conversations about family and friends and your lives, including things you have done together.

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**Applying a Person-Centered Approach to Communication**

**3** Be patient.

  
Tips

- Give the person time to decide what they want to say.
- Avoid interrupting.
- Try not to speak for them.
- Give them choices.
- Connect in the moment.

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**Applying a Person-Centered Approach to Communication**

**4** **Limit distractions.**

 **Tips**

- Find a quiet place that has few distractions.
- Get rid of extra noise and visual distractions.
- Have one-on-one conversations.
- Keep conversations simple.
- Turn off or turn down the sound of the TV.
- Put away your phone.

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**Applying a Person-Centered Approach to Communication**

**5** **Use nonverbal communication.**

 **Tips**

It can be helpful to know how to send and receive messages without using words.

- Use positive body language and facial expressions.
- Use hand gestures, like pointing to an object.
- Make eye contact.
- Use gentle physical contact.
- Use touch, sight, sounds and tastes as other ways to communicate.

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**Understanding Behavior Changes**

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**What is dementia-related behavior?**



- It's like an alarm telling you a need is not being met. Examples include feeling unsafe or uncomfortable.
- Behaviors are not always the same. The person may have "good" and "bad" days.
- The person living with dementia cannot control their behavior.



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**What causes changes in behavior?**



- The disease causes brain cells to break down.
- These changes in the brain make it harder for the person to understand the world around them.
- The person may have trouble knowing what's real, what's safe and what is the right thing for them to do.



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**Behaviors are a Form of Communication**



- People living with dementia react to what they think, feel or need from the people and the world around them. These reactions are a form of communication.
- Caregivers must connect with the person to figure out what they are trying to tell you with their behavior.
- These behaviors are not related to the person's true feelings about you or other people. Try not to take them personally.

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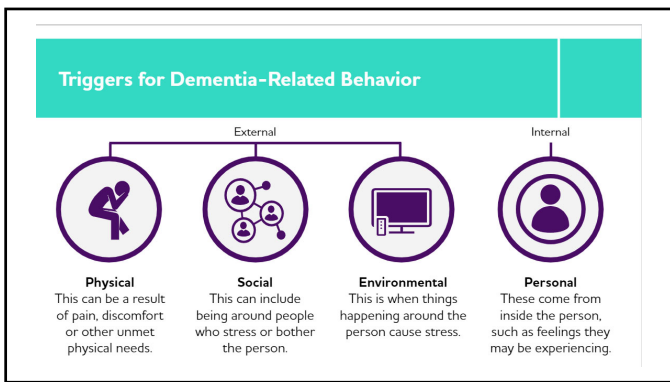
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**Non-Medical Approaches to Dementia-Related Behaviors**



- A non-medical approach should always come first.
- It should focus on giving physical and emotional comfort.
- This approach can help identify and meet the needs of a person who has trouble expressing themselves.
- Use what you know about the person to help manage or reduce the behavior.

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**Four-step approach to addressing behaviors**



- 1 Detect and connect
- 2 Take care of physical needs
- 3 Help with emotional needs
- 4 Review and plan for next time

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**Four-Step Approach to Addressing Behaviors**

**1 Detect and connect**



- Use what you know about the person to try and understand their needs or feelings.
- Join the person in their reality. It will help you understand what they are trying to express.
- Approach the person calmly, quietly and with respect as you figure out the situation.
- Avoid correcting the person.



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**Four-Step Approach to Addressing Behaviors**


**2 Take care of physical needs**



**Always start by looking for needs connected to medical issues or physical pain.**

**To identify and address physical needs:**

- Check what may be causing physical discomfort. Maybe the person is wearing uncomfortable clothing or is hungry. Maybe there is too much activity in the room.
- Make changes to make the person more comfortable.
- Contact the person's doctor about any signs of pain or medical problems.



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**Four-Step Approach to Addressing Behaviors**


**3 Help with emotional needs**



Think about how the person might be feeling in the situation.

**Tips to help address the person's feelings:**

- Focus on possible emotions instead of the facts of the situation.
- Offer comfort. Let them know you are there, you are safe together and you are trying to make them more comfortable.
- Redirect their energy into a more relaxing activity. Find something that gives them joy.
- If they don't respond to the things you are trying, let it go. Try the approach another time.



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**Four-Step Approach to Addressing Behaviors**


**4 Review and plan for next time**



Go back to the "detect and connect" step. Think about what worked and what didn't.

**To help plan for next time, think about:**

- What are the warning signs that the behavior may be coming back?
- What responses work well? And in what order?
- When will you need to respond?
- How can you tell if your approach worked?
- Who else can help?



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**Real-Life Examples of the Four-Step Approach**

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**Four-Step Approach in Action**

- Anxiety and agitation.
- Aggression and anger.
- Suspicion and delusions.
- Getting lost or wandering.

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**Anxiety and agitation**

**Situations that cause anxiety and agitation:**

- Moving to a new residence, such as a nursing home.
- Changes in the environment, like travel, hospitalization or houseguests.
- Changes in caregiver arrangements.
- Believing that something is a threat.
- Feeling afraid or tired from trying to make sense of the world around them.

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**Let's apply Step 1: Detect and Connect to a real-life situation.**

Eugene is living with dementia. He lives in a quiet apartment with his daughter, Denise. Eugene spends most days in the living room doing jigsaw puzzles. Denise's sister and her young children visit from out of town. The kids are noisy and running around the apartment. Eugene looks anxious and does not want to come out of his room.

- 1 Detect and connect**
- 2 Take care of physical needs
- 3 Help with emotional needs
- 4 Review and plan for next time

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**Let's apply Step 1: Detect and Connect to a real-life situation.**

How could Denise detect and connect with Eugene?  
**Select the three best tips that apply.**



- 1. Try to see the situation from Eugene's perspective.
- 2. Think about when Eugene's behavior started.
- 3. Consider if having noisy, young children in the apartment is making Eugene feel anxious.
- 4. Get angry and assume Eugene is just being difficult

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**Let's apply Step 1: Detect and Connect to a real-life situation.**

In this example, Denise can detect and connect with Eugene by using what she knows about his usual routine and preferences. Her houseguests changed Eugene's routine.

[Continue](#)



- 1. Try to see the situation from Eugene's perspective.
- 2. Think about when Eugene's behavior started.
- 3. Consider if having noisy, young children in the apartment is making Eugene feel anxious.
- 4. Get angry and assume Eugene is just being difficult

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**Four-Step Approach in Action**



Anxiety and agitation.



Aggression and anger.



Suspicion and delusions.



Getting lost or wandering.

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**Suspicion and delusions**

**Situations that can lead to suspicion:**

- The person's wallet is empty.
- The person forgets that they moved an item from one place to another.
- A caregiver moves things to another place in the home when cleaning.



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**Let's apply Step 3: Help with Emotional Needs to a real-life situation.**

Clara is 85 years old and living with Alzheimer's disease. She is living with her daughter, Irene. Recently, Clara has been nervously walking around the house. She looks out all of the windows in the afternoons. She will often tell Irene, "Those people are out there again. They came in here last night and took my purse." Irene tells Clara that no one has broken in and her purse is in the closet. However, Clara keeps walking around the house and is becoming even more upset.

- 1 Detect and connect
- 2 Take care of physical needs
- 3 **Help with emotional needs**
- 4 Review and plan for next time

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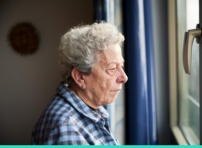
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**Let's apply Step 3: Help with Emotional Needs to a real-life situation.**

How can Irene help with emotional needs when Clara has these suspicions and delusions? **Select the two best tips that apply.**



- 1. Irene can distract Clara by asking her to set the table for dinner.
- 2. Irene can reassure Clara that she is safe and offer to check that all doors in the house are locked.
- 3. Irene can listen carefully to Clara's accusations and say that she is taking the problem seriously.

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**Let's apply Step 3: Help with Emotional Needs to a real-life situation.**

In this example, Irene can listen carefully and tell Clara that she is taking the problem seriously. She can also reassure Clara that she is safe and offer to check the locks.

**Continue**



1. Irene can distract Clara by asking her to set the table for dinner.
2. Irene can reassure Clara that she is safe and offer to check that all doors in the house are locked.
3. Irene can listen carefully to Clara's accusations and say that she is taking the problem seriously.

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 **Medical Approaches to Dementia-Related Behaviors**

Some behaviors are triggered by a critical medical need. Examples include:

- **Drug side effects.** Side effects from prescription drugs can affect behavior. So can interactions among drugs.
- **Discomfort from infections or other conditions.** The person may not be able to communicate pain connected to a common illness or condition. Examples include a urinary tract infection, discomfort from needing to use the toilet, feeling feverish or having chills.
- **Uncorrected hearing or vision problems.** These can lead to confusion, frustration and feeling alone.



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 **Medical Approaches to Dementia-Related Behaviors**

**Medication**

- Talk to a doctor if you think there is a medical problem. The doctor can decide if the person needs medication.
- Some doctors may prescribe antipsychotic medications. This is to reduce and control symptoms like delusions and hallucinations.
- Always talk with the doctor about risks and benefits of any medications before making a decision to use them.



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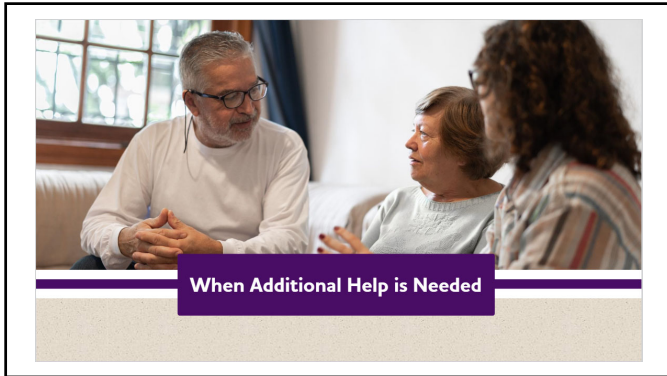
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### When Additional Help Is Needed

- Behaviors can be stressful no matter how well you use these approaches.
- Dementia-related behaviors may be more severe and happen more often as the disease progresses.
- You might want to find outside help or a different caregiving setting if:
  - Behaviors become too much for your emotional or physical health.
  - You are worried that anyone in the house is not safe.



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### A Note About Gun Safety and 911

- If there are firearms in the home, dementia-related behaviors such as suspicion, delusions or aggression can quickly become dangerous.
- To prevent accidents from happening, caregivers should seriously think about removing guns and other weapons from the home, or locking them in a cabinet.
- If the safety of the person living with Alzheimer's, a caregiver or another individual is at risk, call 911 and make sure police or first responders know before they arrive that the person has dementia.



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 <b>Alzheimer's Association Resources and Support</b>		
 <b>24/7 Helpline</b> (800.272.3900)	 <b>Local Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find your chapter (<a href="http://alz.org/findus">alz.org/findus</a>)</li> <li>• Support groups</li> <li>• Alzheimer's Association &amp; AARP Community Resource Finder (<a href="http://alz.org/crf">alz.org/crf</a>)</li> </ul>	
 <b>Online (<a href="http://alz.org">alz.org</a>)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://alz.org/care">alz.org/care</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://alz.org/safety">alz.org/safety</a></li> <li>• <a href="http://alz.org/driving">alz.org/driving</a></li> </ul>	<b>ALZConnected®</b> ( <a href="http://alz.org/alzconnected">alz.org/alzconnected</a> )  <b>ALZNavigator™</b> ( <a href="http://alz.org/alznavigator">alz.org/alznavigator</a> )	 <b>Education Programs</b> ( <a href="http://alz.org/education">alz.org/education</a> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-person, online and virtual</li> </ul>

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Questions?


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