

A Non-Confrontational Approach

People who have problems with memory, thinking and reasoning sometimes seem to react in a way that seems odd or irrational. They may, for example have trouble making what seem like very simple decisions. They may ask the same question over and over. They may shout at other people or be angry for what seems like no good reason. It is important to remember that reactions or behaviour that **seem** irrational are usually simply an attempt to make sense of muddled ideas and memories that form in the mind.

The natural reaction when things like this happen is to point out mistakes or become frustrated or angry yourself. This usually just makes things worse for everyone. The person may be unaware that there is anything wrong with them. Or they may forget from time to time that there is something wrong. Or they may be aware that *something* is wrong but are not quite sure what. Try to imagine if someone suddenly started telling **you** what to do and how to do it or where to go and when. You think you're fine but everyone else keeps interfering. Most of us would be puzzled, perhaps resentful or even angry.

How can I help?

There is no one right or wrong way of responding. However, with trial and error it usually is possible to learn which approach tends to work best for an individual in a particular situation. The following **ABC guidelines** should help.

Remember though that being a carer can be stressful. Sometimes you will be simply too tired to react in the way you know works best. We are all human and can only do the best we can!

Step 1. Think 'Why'

Why might this be happening. For example, a person with dementia may have difficulties understanding concepts and remembering what they have been told. They may quickly forget about the coronavirus pandemic and the recommendations to stay at home and regularly wash our hands.

Step 2. Think ABC

Avoid confrontation

Confronting the person with their mistakes is unlikely to help. It creates a negative atmosphere for no benefit. A neutral approach can help keep the peace. This involves giving a non-committal response to mistakes, for example *"Oh really"* or *"I don't know"* rather than using lengthy arguments, discussion or correction. It is important though not actively to mislead the person by giving wrong information.

Be practical

It sometimes is possible to anticipate situations that cause problems and to avoid them. When a problem does arise, there may be something practical you can do to ease the situation.

Clarify the feelings and comfort

If the person is anxious or upset clarifying their feelings and showing you care may help. *"You seem worried. Can I help?"* *"I can see you're frustrated. It's very difficult at the moment isn't it?"*

Some other tips:

- Keep calm and use a calm voice - a person may be more sensitive to the emotional content of speech.
- Try to calm the person if they become distressed.
- Be prepared to repeat information – avoid stating “I just told you that”, it is not the person’s fault that they cannot remember.
- Don’t argue and disagree with the person. Accept, rather than contradict.
- Don’t bombard the person with questions, this will just increase their anxiety, instead listen,
- Give information in a simple format - dementia can affect a person’s language skills and understanding information can be more difficult as the condition progresses.
- Give instructions one at a time, ideally with a visual cue. Let the person complete each step before giving them a further instruction.

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