



# **COPING WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR**

**A guide for dementia carers**



## Dementia Help Founder Christina Neal says...

**C**aring for a person with dementia is a huge challenge. I cared for my late mother Hazel, who had vascular dementia, for ten years.

As mum's dementia progressed, she suffered from mood swings and often became aggressive. Personality changes can be upsetting, and it can be difficult to know what to do.

However, there can be reasons for changes in mood

and some can be resolved.

This quick guide explains the key causes and how to manage them. I hope you find it useful.

**Christina Neal**

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*I hope this guide will unlock some of the reasons behind your loved one's behaviour*



## The challenges of being a carer

**C**aring for a person with dementia can be exhausting. Coping with all the practical challenges is difficult. On top of that, you might be dealing with challenging behaviour.

### Mood swings

Your loved one's moods may be unpredictable. One minute they may seem happy, the next they might be shouting. Naturally this is upsetting, but it's important to remember that dementia is a disease of the brain.

### Changes in the brain

There are changes going on that may be out of the person's control. It's important to try to understand the cause of the behaviour, in order to resolve it or avoid it altogether in future.

*Rather than simply chalking it up to a bad mood, it's important to try and understand the cause of the behaviour*

## Handling aggressive behaviour

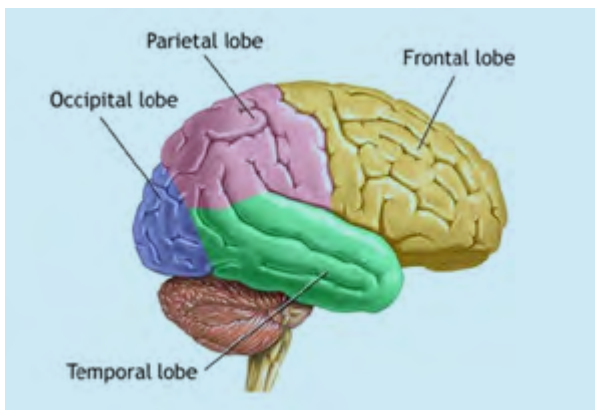


### Here's how to deal with anger in a person with dementia...

- 1 If it is safe to do so, walk away and do something else. Give the person some space.
- 2 Try to identify the cause of the frustration. Is the person struggling to perform a task?
- 3 Offer guidance if the person is struggling to do something, but resist the urge to take over completely.
- 4 Sit calmly with your loved one and hold their hand if they will let you.
- 5 Remember, it's not personal and it will pass in time.

## » Dementia and the brain - what's going on?

**T**o understand more about the causes behind challenging behaviour, it's helpful to learn about the brain. The brain is divided into four sections, called 'lobes':



- » **The frontal lobe** controls thinking, memory, behaviour and movement. The occipital lobe controls sight.
- » **The parietal lobe** controls language and touch.
- » **The temporal lobe** controls

hearing, learning and feelings. Other areas of the brain affected by dementia include the **hippocampus** (which date logs memories), and the **amygdala** (which processes emotions and records reactions).

When you see how the different lobes influence our abilities, you can understand why dementia can affect a person's moods.

### » Possible causes of challenging behaviour and how to respond

If your loved one suddenly gets angry or upset, there could be various reasons for it. Read on for more insights...

*Look for giveaway signs that the person may be in pain, such as a change in walking patterns, sitting in a hunched fashion, or becoming protective of a painful area*





### ① Are they in pain?

If the person is no longer able to express themselves or describe what's wrong, shouting could be a way of defending themselves or trying to tell you they're in pain. Look for giveaway signs, such as a change in walking pattern, being hunched over, being protective of a painful area (such as holding their stomach), grimacing, tensing or looking pale or sweaty (an indication of a high temperature).

Ask them if something hurts, but even if they say yes, they may not be able to say where the pain is coming from. A general analgesia prescribed by the person's GP (for mild to moderate pain) might make them more comfortable.

### ② Are they hungry or thirsty?

Has the person eaten or had a drink recently? Dehydration is a common source of confusion, so ensure they have plenty to drink, and offer small, easy-to-manage snacks.

### ③ Could they have an infection?

Urinary tract infections can be more common in elderly people, and those with dementia may have trouble communicating their discomfort. UTIs can cause increased confusion, so if you are at all concerned, visit the person's GP.



***“If the person can't express themselves, shouting could be a way of trying to tell you they're in pain”***



#### ④ **Are they bored?**

If your loved one is used to being active, but has recently had to give up driving, for example, they may be suffering from a lack of stimulation, which can lead to frustration. Look into local groups, or suggest going for a walk.

#### ⑤ **Are they tired?**

Did they have a bad night's sleep? A short nap can help alleviate anger, though ideally not too late in the day.

#### ⑥ **Are you doing too much?**

Try not to take over the chores completely. Involve the person in domestic tasks if you can so that they have a purpose.

#### ⑦ **Are they anxious?**

Do they get angry in relation to a specific event, or at a certain

time of day? Such as when it is time for you to leave? Perhaps they are fearful of being on their own. Do you usually give them a warning that you will be leaving soon? This gives them time to worry about it, heightening anxiety. Chat to them until you're about to leave, then announce you're going just before you depart.



***The person may be suffering from a lack of stimulation, which can easily lead to frustration and anger***



› **Are they experiencing ‘sundowning’?**

Sundowning refers to a sudden change in mood that usually affects a person with dementia, often in the afternoon or early evening. It’s been suggested it could be due to chemical changes in the brain. Try to distract them at this time of day. Suggest a walk or put on some music.

› **Have you contradicted them?**

The person may feel frustrated at being able unable to recall

memories or articulate their thoughts. If they get their facts muddled, don’t correct them.

› **How to cope**

Anger will pass. Your loved one won’t remember they were angry ten minutes ago, so try not to dwell on the incident. Read on for advice on how to cope with anger...

“*Allowing the person a sense of independence is so important*”





### 1 Try to stay calm

If you feel yourself getting angry, walk away if it is safe to leave the person alone for a while and give yourself a break.

### 2 Accept you are the one that needs to change

A person with dementia can't control their emotions in the same way as you can – you need to be the one to change your behaviour.

### 3 Take care of yourself

Caring for a loved one is tiring, which is why it's important to take care of yourself, too. Make sure you have time for yourself each day to do something you enjoy even if it's just for 20 minutes. It will clear your head.

*Encourage the person to keep up with hobbies or interests*

## Managing depression



**Depression can be common in a person with dementia. To help ease the effects...**

- 1 Encourage the person to keep up with hobbies and interests.
- 2 Focus on what they can do, rather than what they can't.
- 3 Let them know you will always be there for them.
- 4 Seek advice from the person's GP.



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