



As dementia progresses, a person may struggle to express their emotions. They may begin to have verbally or physically aggressive behaviours. Aggression may be sudden. It can also occur due to a frustrating situation. Emotional outbursts are hard to manage. The behaviour may be out of character for the person and upsetting to witness.

If a person with dementia is acting angry or agitated, you may be wondering:

WHY IS THIS BEHAVIOUR HAPPENING?

Most of the time, behaviour caused by anger and agitation happens for a reason. The person may not be able to tell you what they are feeling or why they are feeling that way.

Common causes of angry or aggressive behaviour include:

- **Changes in the brain**
 - Brain cells that help regulate emotions are being damaged by the dementia. This can lead to loss of judgement and self-control. It can make the person feel confused or lost. Their abilities may change making it hard to communicate or inhibit their anger.
 - For more information on loss of inhibition, read the **Disinhibition** Fact Sheet, located [Here](#).
- **Physical discomfort**
 - Pain, fever, illness, side effects of medication, impaired vision or hearing, fatigue, hunger, or thirst.
- **Environmental factors**
 - Too much stimulation, too much noise, or poor lighting.
- **Changes in emotions**
 - Feeling frightened, frustrated, humiliated, or helpless.

HOW CAN I PREVENT OR MANAGE ANGER AND AGITATION?

- Make sure the person has regular health checks.
- Agitation can be a symptom of depression or anxiety. Talk to a doctor if you suspect this is the case.
- Help the person follow a consistent routine to reduce stress.
- Allow the person to keep as much control in their life as possible.
- Schedule quiet times in the day.
- Make sure the person gets enough exercise and participates in enjoyable activities.
- Break activities or tasks into smaller steps to avoid frustration.

HOW CAN I BETTER COMMUNICATE WITH THE PERSON?

Having good communication can help the person feel calm and reassured. Here are some strategies to try:

- **Always approach the person from the front.** If you are going to touch them, ask first.
- **Reassure the person.** Listen to their concerns and frustrations. Repeat their concerns or frustrations back to them to show that you understand.
- **Explain things calmly and in simple sentences.** They may need more time to respond.
- **Use a calm and even tone of voice.** As the person's language abilities change, they will rely more on how you say things rather than what you say.
- **Avoid facts that may cause distress.** If they are calling for someone from their past, try reminiscing with them. This can help the person feel more connected to their memories.

Read the *Understanding Behaviour Changes* Fact Sheet for more management strategies: [Click Here](#).

REMEMBER TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- **Take a break.** If the person is in a safe environment and you are able, walk away and take a moment for yourself. You may need to give the person space to cool down.
- **Have a clear plan on what do to if you feel unsafe.** Know where you will go and who you will call in case of an emergency.
- If your safety is threatened, leave the area right away. Contact the **crisis line at 613-722-6914** or call **911**. Caregivers have the right to be safe.

MORE INFORMATION

- Watch the **Understanding Behaviour Change Webinar**: <https://youtu.be/Ys55HhyrWZo>
- Sign up for Dementia Society workshops: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/ottawa-programs/>
 - For more information about behavioural and psychological symptoms, sign up for **Dementia Basics**.
 - For more information on support strategies and approaches, sign up for **Supporting Dementia**.
- Talk to a **Dementia Care Coach**. A coach can help you find strategies and resources for your unique situation. <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/dementia-care-coach/>
 - After hours, contact the **Ontario Caregiver Hotline**. They are available 24/7 to answer care questions: 1-833-416-2273
- **Connect with others facing similar situations.** Register for a caregiver support group: <https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/ottawa-programs/>.

Ottawa: 613-523-4004 Renfrew-County: 1-888-411-2067 | info@dsorc.org | DementiaHelp.ca

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