



**UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR IN  
DEMENTIA – KNOWLEDGE**

## UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR IN DEMENTIA

### SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE TRAINING PACK

This training pack is intended for staff who already have a basic knowledge and understanding of working with dementia. Where phrases or approaches that staff may not be familiar with are used, a brief explanation is given. The training pack is intended to help staff focus on issues around challenging behaviour. Although it is wide ranging in approach with a lot of background information and detail, the pack is not intended to be a comprehensive training resource to cover every aspect of working with dementia. Such an ambition would be impossible to achieve within the scope of one training pack.

The training pack will explore some identified challenging behaviours in more detail, looking at possible reasons behind the behaviours. Other areas that may have an additional impact on behaviour in dementia, such as environmental factors, are also considered.

The training pack will cover how issues and techniques that staff are already aware of such as Reality Orientation may relate to challenging behaviour.

Staff responses to aggression are also looked at, both verbal and non-verbal responses. The pack also outlines potential strategies for helping to deal with challenging behaviour.

Issues around challenging behaviour are then considered in relation to staff support and development workplace policies and procedures.

Finally, the pack looks at the challenging behaviour toolkit.

### CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

A generally accepted definition of challenging behaviour in health and social care services is "Any behaviour that negatively effects both the perpetrator and those around them to a significant and frequent degree".

The key words in this definition are "significant" and "frequent". Therefore a one off incident, although it may be distressing and traumatic for those involved, would not generally be considered as challenging behaviour as it would not be frequent. Similarly, a resident in a care home whose manner is frequently a bit cold and abrupt would not usually be considered to have challenging behaviour unless the negative impact of the behaviour was significant.

## DEALING WITH AGGRESSION

### Verbal skills

- Acknowledge the persons distress
- Keep sentences simple
- Don't argue or defend
- Don't patronise or cajole
- Encourage verbalisation – try and get the person to tell you why they are angry
- Avoid inappropriate use of humour
- Tell the person what you are going to do

### Non verbal skills

- Soften voice tone
- Respect the other persons space
- Avoid sudden movements that may be misinterpreted
- Pay close attention to NVC, be wary of adopting an aggressive posture

## AGGRESSION OR ASSERTIVENESS?

People have a need to have their own possessions, their own space, a sense of "This is mine". When this space is violated or not respected by staff, sometimes challenging behaviour due to anger, embarrassment, or frustration may result.

When we work day to day in a care environment, we may become very familiar with usual routines, preferences, and sometimes slip into "automatic pilot mode". We may not be so acutely aware of our own behaviour, actions, and the impact that we may be having on others.

For example, although we may knock before entering a bedroom, do we ask permission before pulling the curtains back on a bright summer morning or do we just go ahead and do it, "What a lovely morning lets have a bit of the sunshine in". When we need to move something from the edge of a bedside table in case it gets knocked over do we ask first to check if it is Ok to move it?

## **C – Consequences**

This describes what happened afterwards, what was the immediate result of the behaviour. For example did other people leave the room? Did other people enter the room?

An ABC analysis may help to establish whether the behaviour is being triggered by events, or is being perpetuated by the responses and consequences following the behaviour.

Although not typical, working with people in the early stages of dementia the reasons for the behaviour may be related to the consequences. The consequences may even be something that we would perceive as being negative. For example, one consequence may be that the individual displaying the behaviours is taken away by a senior member of staff and given a “talking to” about acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. However, on further examination staff realise that this is the only 1-1 time with staff that the person ever has, and so it is this 1-1 time that is perpetuating the behaviour. The solution is to offer the 1-1 time (deliver the consequence) before the behaviour occurs.

In the middle and later stages of dementia, it is unlikely in the extreme that the behaviour is continuing because of the consequences, the reason being that the individual would not remember the consequences from one instance of the behaviour to the next. The behaviour is much more likely to be related to the antecedents, and so we look for a potential trigger for the behaviour. When we understand what the triggers are, we may be able to remove the triggers or ensure that the person is not exposed to the triggers to help prevent the behaviour. At the very least, we should be able to anticipate when the behaviour is most likely to happen so appropriate support can be put in place.

## **STAFF SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION**

Some of the skills and abilities that staff need to work in a contemporary dementia care service are:

- Communication skills, ability to listen empathically
- Ability to undertake meaningful risk assessments “on the hoof”
- Ability to relate to and support families as well as the individual being looked after
- Confidence to engage with individuals displaying problematic behaviours
- Analysing reasons for problematic behaviours
- Patience and understanding when assisting with practical tasks, not offering more support than necessary so independence is maximised

### **Exercise**

What are your organisations policies and procedures for supervision and staff development? How will your organisation make sure that you have these skills and abilities?