

Devon Memory Café Consortium (DMCC) information Leaflet.

Awareness of and understanding Changing and / or Challenging Behaviour.

A person 'living with dementia' may display out-of-character behaviour as the condition progresses. This can become confusing to a carer, difficult and sometimes stressful.

It is important for the carer to try and understand the world as seen by the person 'living with dementia'. To look beyond the condition we call dementia for possible causes for the changing behaviour. Recognition and identification of these underlying needs can help 'head off' stressful situations before they reach crisis point and make it easier to cope.

Dementia can make the world a disturbing and perhaps even a frightening place. The person 'living with dementia' struggles to come to terms with all going on around them, try finding a way to ease distress and enhance wellbeing. Environment changes might cause spatial disorientation, ask, is the person receiving enough stimulation? In some cases boredom and resultant frustration can have an effect.

Behavioural changes may be caused by undiagnosed pain.

A carer's response should involve attempting to view matters from the person's perspective and recognise and address the underlying cause.

Out-of-character behaviour may resolve itself over time; the carer often manages this period alone. However, there are times when this behaviour persists; in these cases it is always wise to seek professional help from your GP. Your doctor should be able to rule out any physical problem (e.g. infection, pain, constipation), consider also testing eyesight and hearing. Has any change in medication taken place? Consider other non physical causes, e.g. is the person depressed?

If all tests fail to solve the behavioural problem then ask to be referred to a specialist.

Manage Changing and / or Challenging Behaviour.

Simple and practical Non Drug steps to help manage reduce or avoid out of character behaviour.

- Encourage and maintain social contact with the person. This is important and will develop quality time between carer and cared for, it will also encourage dignity.
- Reduce noise and ensure aids or signs are in place to help orientation.
- Try introducing a musical element to your day; you may be surprised at just how effective this is.
- Introduce a simple sitting exercise routine into your day.
- Involve the person in meaningful activities, e.g. preparing vegetables or tidying a bed.
- Encourage a 'life book' where familiar objects and photos are readily available.
- Maintain regular habits, e.g. bed times and a comfortable sleeping environment.
- Try a massage routine, hand massage is effective in reducing agitation.
- Encourage a simple contact code or routine for example should a person need the toilet, they should be able to convey this without embarrassment or stress.

Only consider any form of suppressant drug regime as a very last resort, try to maintain normality for as long as is possible. You will be surprised that, with a little practise, you may be able to recognise behavioural change before they fully develop and avoid crisis situations which may otherwise arise.