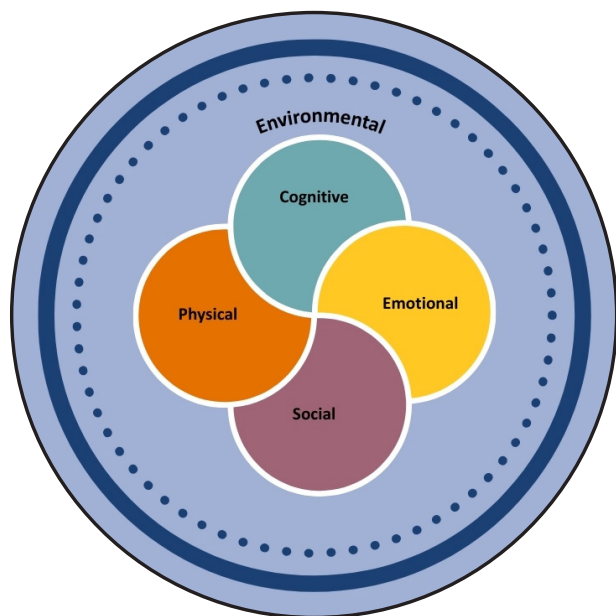




Each person living with dementia is unique and will respond to circumstances in their own way. Dementia can cause people to have responsive behaviours – unexpected actions or expressions that differ from that person’s previous temperament. As a caregiver, you know the person you’re caring for best. Use your knowledge of their personality, preferences and life history to interpret and respond to what is happening.

While some behaviours can be frustrating, **all behaviours have meaning**. Attempting to understand the reason for a behaviour can help you to adapt and potentially even prevent it from happening again. Consider what may be driving the behaviour.

### Possible reasons for changes in behaviour:

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Environmental reasons</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Surroundings may be too noisy, crowded, too large/small or unfamiliar.</li><li>• Lighting may create shadows or glare that leads to visual mistakes.</li><li>• More or less contrast needed to improve visibility (e.g. colour differences on light switches).</li><li>• Need for appropriate “cues” (e.g. toothpaste may signal “washroom”).</li></ul> |
| <b>Physical reasons</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Medication side effects.</li><li>• Fever, discomfort, fatigue or pain.</li><li>• Feeling too hot or too cold.</li><li>• Hunger or thirst.</li><li>• Constipation or needing to use toilet.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Cognitive reasons</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not recognizing people or unfamiliar people.</li><li>• Not remembering answers to questions just asked.</li><li>• Not recalling where a care partner is or when they’ll return.</li><li>• Tasks may become unfamiliar or too complex for the person living with dementia.</li></ul>                                                                     |
| <b>Social reasons</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inability to express an emotion (e.g. fear, confusion).</li><li>• Inability to filter out conversations or understand what is being said.</li><li>• Frustration from an inability to express their message or be understood.</li></ul>                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Emotional reasons</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understimulation</li><li>• Restlessness</li><li>• Loneliness</li><li>• Anxiety</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

## Common changes in behaviour

As someone's ability to communicate changes, they may need to rely on actions rather than words. Below are some common responsive behaviours people living with dementia may exhibit:



### Agitation

- Anger or tension.
- Clenching fists.
- Repetitive hand movements or fiddling.



### Repetitive behaviours

- Repeating a phrase again.
- Tapping or snapping fingers.
- Repeatedly touching a part of their body.



### Confusion

- Lose track of the time or day.
- Forget where familiar places are (e.g. bathroom).
- Have trouble completing everyday tasks.
- Mistake objects for something else (e.g. touchless faucets).



### Vocalizations

- Moaning or grunting.
- Crying or shouting.
- Swearing or calling out names.



### Disinhibition (loss of inhibitions)

- Swearing, rude or racist comments.
- Unwanted sexual advances.
- Taking things (theft).
- Unsafe driving.



### Wanting to go home

- Wanting to return to a familiar place.
- Not recognizing their current environment.
- Wanting to return to a time in life they felt safe or comfortable (e.g. childhood home).
- Feeling depressed or overwhelmed.



### Resisting care

- Shower or bathing.
- Changing clothes.
- Taking medications.



### Delusions, hallucinations and visual mistakes

#### Delusions (false beliefs)

- "Someone stole my wallet."
- "Someone is trying to harm me."



### Pacing and restlessness - especially late in the day

- Often happens later in the day (sometimes called sundowning).
- A person may move continuously, wander or appear unsettled.

### Hallucinations (sensing things not there)

- Seeing or hearing people or animals.
- Seeing or hearing voices or sounds.
- Feeling sensations like bugs on the skin.



### Apathy (loss of initiative)

- Seem uninterested or unmotivated.
- Withdraw from activities.
- Appear depressed.

### Visual mistakes

- Mistaking a coat on a hook for a person.
- Seeing a shadow and thinking it's an animal.

**First Link® Dementia Helpline**

**1-800-936-6033**

Monday to Friday

English (9 a.m. to 8 p.m.)

Cantonese, Mandarin, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu

(9 a.m. to 4 p.m.)