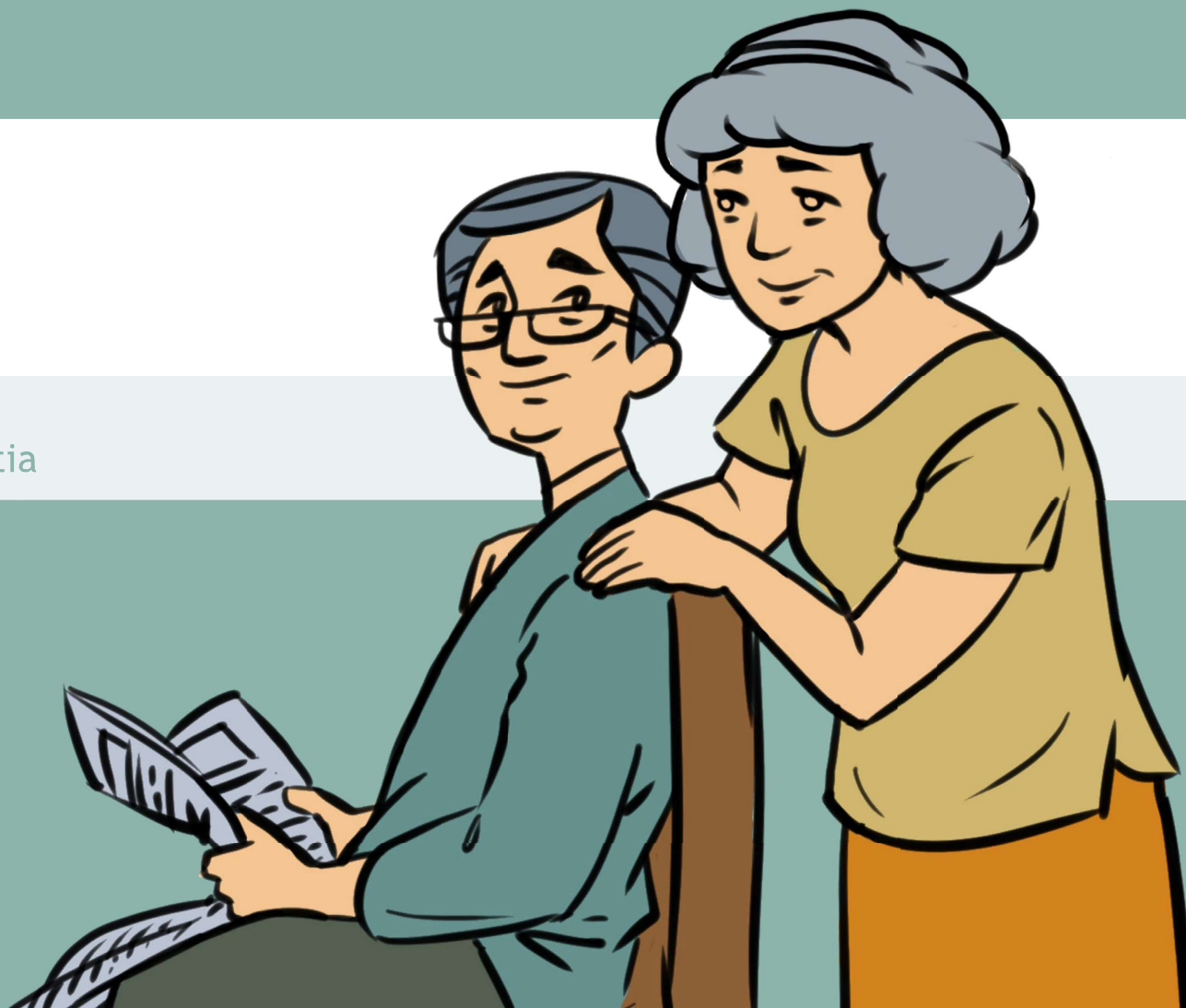


Australian version

iSupport For Dementia

Training and support manual
for carers of people with dementia



Unit 2. Aggression

Why is this unit important?

From time to time, people with dementia may become angry, aggressive or violent. This is often one of the most difficult and challenging things for carers to cope with.

How will this unit help me?

This learning unit helps you understand possible causes of aggression and improves your skills to recognise and to prevent or deal with aggression.

What will I learn?

- Possible causes of aggression
- Ways to change the environment to make it more calming
- How to prevent or deal with aggression.

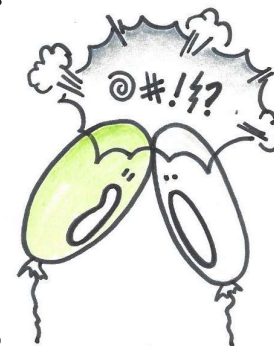
Why does this happen?

Aggression can happen for a variety of reasons. It can be due to:

- unmet needs such as hunger, pain, tiredness,
- Illness, such as a urinary tract infection, medication combinations or side effects,
- or something happening in the environment such as someone trying to get them to do something they do not understand or do not want to do.

In addition, people with dementia may experience difficulties in understanding others, judging social situations, controlling their feelings or expressing themselves in the way they did before. They may also have personality or mental health changes that contribute to aggressive behaviour.

At times, aggression is displayed towards people known to the person with dementia. At other times it can be with strangers. Aggression is often one of the most difficult things for carers to cope with.



Activity



Talking aggressively

Does the person you care for ever talk aggressively to you or other people including speaking too loudly, shouting, yelling or swearing?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Rather not say

Acting Aggressively

And does the person you care for ever act physically aggressively towards you or other people including pushing, shoving, pinching or punching?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Rather not say



Activity



Do you remember the “ABC approach” to analyse changed behaviours?

Just as we mentioned in the Introduction Unit of ‘Person-centred care approach to changed behaviour’, it is important to break down behaviours into three parts in order to help you deal with them.

Do you remember what they are?

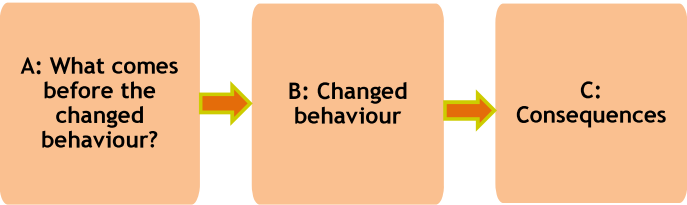
Here they are

Let’s see how it works with a different example.
Have a look at Don, who angrily refuses to take a bath.

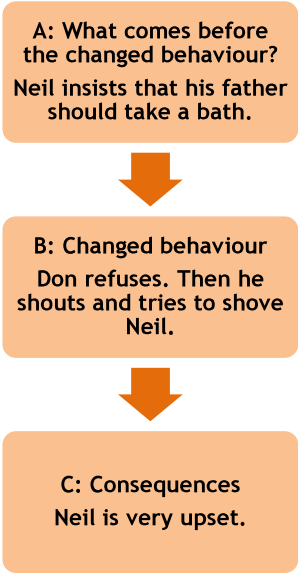
Here is a common example:

Neil wants to assist his father, Don, in taking a bath. Neil says: 'It is time for your bath.' Don refuses. Neil is in a hurry and tugs on his father’s arm. He says: 'You need to have a bath because you’re going to see the doctor.' Don pulls his arm back and resists. He is much stronger than Neil. Neil tugs it again and says angrily: 'You must take a bath because you are going to the doctor and need to be clean.' Don gets agitated and shouts and even tries to shove Neil, who feels stressed and anxious.

Can you break down the behaviour of this example into the three parts?



Let’s look at the ABC approach to analyse the changed behaviour.



Check your understanding



What are some ways Neil could react differently?

Here are possible options, some are good responses, and others are not. Please indicate what you think are good responses. Drag the good responses and drop them in the box.

Neil could:

- ☐ Physically force his father to start bathing.
- ☐ Maintain the dignity and privacy of his father. He could keep him in a robe or towel until he actually takes a bath.
- ☐ Play soothing music that Don likes.
- ☐ Decide that Don does not need a bath before his visit to the doctor.
- ☐ Explain calmly and logically why Don should bathe.
- ☐ Next time, make sure there is enough time so that it is not a stressful situation. Rather than do the bath right before the doctor's appointment, Neil might try to assist with bathing the day before.

- ☐ Neil could put himself in Don's shoes and try to understand why Don might not want to bathe.
- ☐ Identify the best time of day for Don to take a bath and find out whether he prefers a bath or shower.
- ☐ When bathing Don, Neil could keep a towel over his shoulders to help him maintain dignity and to help keep him warm.
- ☐ Neil could ask for someone else to help with Don's bath time.
- ☐ Neil could help Don with a wash by using warm, wet towels with soap without taking Don to the bath.
- ☐ Say in an irritated voice: 'I have already answered that, please stop bothering me'; 'You must take a bath!'.



Check your understanding



What are some ways Neil could react differently?

- ✗ **Physically force his father to start bathing.**
This might result in further physical aggression and may make the situation worse.
- ✓ **Maintain the dignity and privacy of his father. He could keep him in a robe or towel until he actually takes a bath.**
Maintaining dignity and privacy is always a good idea when caring for someone with dementia. It makes sure that the person with dementia is comfortable.
- ✓ **Play soothing music that Don likes.**
Though it may take extra time to arrange the music, this option may help soothe Neil and Don. This may create relaxation and less negative responses from both of them.
- ✓ **Decide that Don does not need a bath before his visit to the doctor.**
Neil may relax his standards if Don is not dirty and does not need to bathe.
- ✓ **Explain calmly and logically why Don should bathe.**
This treats Don with respect and as a reasonable person.
- ✓ **Next time, make sure there is enough time so that it is not a stressful situation. Rather than do the bath right before the doctor's appointment, Neil might try to assist with bathing the day before.**
Allowing more time may reduce tension for Neil and Don. Rushing into anything may not give Don enough time to get used to the idea.

Check your understanding (Continued)

*What are some ways Neil could react differently?*

- ✓ **Neil could put himself in Don's shoes and try to understand why Don might not want to bathe.**
People with dementia can be embarrassed to have someone else help them bathe, or Don might not want his son to help him bathe.
- ✓ **Identify the best time of day for Don to take a bath and find out whether he prefers a bath or shower.**
Respecting the routines and preference of the people with dementia will make them more likely to agree to activities.
- ✓ **When bathing Don, Neil could keep a towel over his shoulders to help him maintain dignity and to help keep him warm.**
This answer is good. Don could be embarrassed to be naked in front of his son or the temperature of the water or the room could be too cold. It's important to look for ways to make the situation more pleasant.
- ✓ **Neil could ask for someone else to help with Don's bath time.**
Sometimes the person with dementia is more comfortable with one family member than another family member. Sometimes even a stranger might find it easier than a family member as the person with dementia might be less embarrassed than with a family member.
- ✓ **Neil could help Don with a wash by using warm, wet towels with soap without taking Don to the bath.**
If the person with dementia is afraid of the bath, or running water, this option will help relieve their distress and can sometimes be used in place of baths. There are also products such as dry shampoo and cleaning products used for young children which might help.
- ✗ **Say in an irritated voice: 'I have already answered that, please stop bothering me'; 'You must take a bath!'**
This is unhelpful and might make the situation worse.

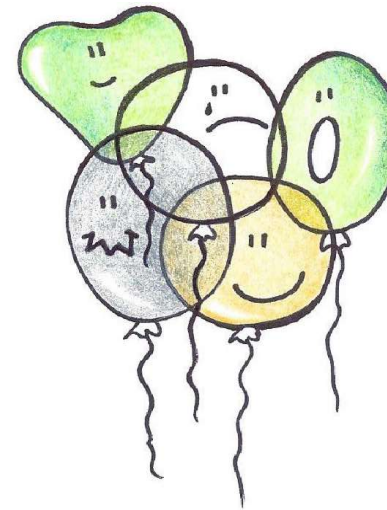
Check your understanding



What could Neil do?

What could Neil do if his approach does not work the first time? Check as many as apply.

- ☐ Neil could try several approaches until he finds one that works.
- ☐ Neil could get suggestions from others, such as family members, or ideas from care support groups and Dementia Australia.



Check your understanding



- ✓ Neil could try several approaches until he finds one that works.
Different approaches may work at different times so Neil should not give up!
- ✓ Neil could get suggestions from others, such as family members, or ideas from care support groups and Dementia Australia.
Getting ideas from others can sometimes help find an approach that works.

Activity



Let's look at your own situation

It is important to relate what you just have learnt to your own situation. These boxes are for you, like a diary.
Has the person you care for ever been aggressive with you? If so, describe the last time this happened.

What could you do to change what happened before the behaviour?

What could you do to change your response to the behaviour?

What could you do to change the environment to make it more calming?

Let's review what you have learned

- Aggression like shouting, shoving or pushing can happen to carers of people with dementia.
- Aggression can be very upsetting for the person with dementia as well as the carer and others.
- Try to change the environment to make it more calming, do not rush things.
- Try to maintain the dignity of the person you care for, do not force the person you care for.
- If one approach does not work, try another one.
- Realise there may be good and bad moments.
- Try different responses and approaches, as the first one does not always work.
- Remind yourself that aggression can be a part of the dementia, or a reaction to the disease.
- If the person is suddenly behaving aggressively, there may be an underlying cause (for example, a urinary infection) that should be investigated by a doctor.
- Take a deep breath and think about the most positive ways to respond that will be least distressing for you and the person you care for.
- Don't force the situation - consider if leaving it for now is an option.
- If the person you care for continues to show aggression, there are a lot of resources available on the internet. Look for examples on the Dementia Australia website: <https://www.dementia.org.au/>

RELATED LEARNING UNITS

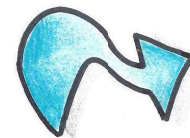
- Module 2 Unit 2 Improving communication
- Module 4 Unit 4 Personal care

Additional resources

- **Dementia Australia:** <https://www.dementia.org.au/>
The National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500 is open nationally from 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday excluding public holidays. A message service is available if you call outside operating hours.
- **Dementia Support Australia** <https://www.dementia.com.au/>
The Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS) offers people with dementia and their carers support in managing behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia, such as walking and getting lost and aggression. Contact them on 1800 699 799 (24 hours a day).
- **My Aged Care** <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au>
Carer support groups can sometimes be organised around specific caring roles and the situation of the person you care for. For information about these groups in your area visit the website or call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.
- **Home Support Programme**
<https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/getting-started>
The My Aged Care is an Australian Government website and phone line to help you find out what aged care services may be available to help you. call My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.

You finished this learning unit, well done!

Would you like to try the following relaxation exercise?



Neck movements

With this exercise you will feel less tension in your neck. It will also increase the blood flow to your brain.



This is how you do it:

- Make sure to move slowly and with attention.
- Bend your neck forward and backward.
- Inhale while you lift your head up and back. Exhale while you drop your chin to your chest.
- Rotate your chin from side to side.
- Inhale when your chin is in the centre. Exhale when you look to the side.
- Drop your ear towards your shoulder.
- Inhale when you are in the centre. Exhale when you drop your ear to your shoulder.
- Repeat 5 times.



You finished this unit, well done!