

DO'S TO REMEMBER

Suggestions for Preventing and Responding to Distressing Behaviors with a Person with Cognitive Impairment

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1. **Respect** this person. Get to know their strengths, concerns, desires and preferences. Learn about their past by talking with people who knew them. Examine yourself to address any negative feelings you may have about this person.
2. **Ask yourself “Why?”**. Why is this person acting this way, doing this, saying this, feeling like this . . . ?
3. Notice ways that **you are engaging in behaviors** that may be distressing to this person. For example, are you making too much noise?
4. Try to see the situation **as this person might see it**. Try to “sit in their skin” or “walk in their shoes”. **Accommodate sensory, cognitive, and motor changes**.
5. Figure out what this person might be **feeling**.
6. Respond to this person’s feelings. Reassure them. **Address the distress**, not simply the behavior.
7. Remove whatever is triggering distress for this person, or is causing this person to act in a way that is distressing to others. **Modify the environment**, your **interactions** with them, or the **task**, rather than trying to change the person or their behavior.
8. Remind yourself this person most likely **can’t control** what they are saying or doing, or at least can’t stop themselves in time from doing something they know they shouldn’t do.
9. Be **calm** and **kind**, regardless of the situation. Avoid embarrassing this person. Help them save face. Avoid calling attention to their behavior or difficulty in doing a task.
10. **Leave** for a while, if this person and others are safe and if it would help. Figure out what you can do differently next time to be more helpful.
11. When this person is ready, **return** and try again to help them with the task or to talk with them.
12. At all times, help this person feel **safe** and **comfortable**, regardless of the task you are doing with them. Help them feel relaxed. Communicate that you are on “their side” against any problem they are having. Avoid correcting, contradicting, or arguing with them.

13. Remember, you are here to help this person. This person has a right to make their **own decisions**. You are here to help them make the decisions, not to make the decisions for them.
14. **Watch** this person while you are with them. Look for the first signs of discomfort or confusion so you can adapt the way you are interacting with them to accommodate their needs and desires.
15. Read and **learn** about cognitive impairment and how it changes a person's ability to understand and respond to other people and their environment.
16. Be **creative** with your responses and interactions with this person. Try new strategies when the ones you are using don't work.
17. Create or adapt each intervention to each situation and each person. **Individualize** your interventions. Build on strengths and compensate for or adapt to changes in abilities.
18. Intervene **only if** there is **distress** or when necessary. If no one is hurt or distressed by a behavior, then simply accommodate it.
19. **Intervene when:**
 - a. The **person** is not **safe** and the risk is not justified (that is, the person or caregiver believes the risk of harm and amount of harm outweigh the benefits).
 - b. **Other people** are not **safe**.
 - c. **Other people's property** is not safe and is too valuable.
 - d. The **person's property** is not safe and the risk is not justified.
20. Keep in mind your **goals** in this general order of priority:
 - a. Help this person **feel good** about themselves and about life in general.
 - b. Prevent and respond to behaviors that: are **dangerous** to this person or others, are **distressing** to this person or others, reflect or express a **desire or need** by meeting the desire or need.
 - c. Help this person's brain and **cognitive skills grow** as much as possible, to accommodate and compensate for their impairment in specific cognitive functions.
 - d. Help this person more easily, independently, and successfully do **tasks** they **want** to do, and tasks they **need** to do to allow them to do other tasks they want to do (for example, learning to walk so they can walk in the park).
21. Remind yourself of what you **like** and **love** about this person.
22. Rest and **take care of yourself**. Helping someone with cognitive impairment can be very exhausting, emotionally, mentally, and physically. Avoid taking distressing events, behaviors, and comments personally. Care for yourself so that you may appreciate and love this person more fully.