

# Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

## Abuse & Neglect / Violence

People with dementia are especially vulnerable to mistreatment, partly because caring for them can put so much stress on those who provide care. If you don't understand the reason for his behavior, you may misinterpret it as hostile to you, rather than caused by their illness. Understanding the disease, knowing how best to communicate with a person with dementia, and having adequate support for yourself can go a long way toward preventing these very upsetting situations.

A person with Alzheimer's disease may sometimes act in ways that are upsetting or seem aggressive. He or she may hit, scratch, or fight with the caregiver. This does *not* always happen. But if it does, it is likely to be when the person is in the middle stage of Alzheimer's disease. This stage can last for up to four years.

These actions can be upsetting and are often hard for caregivers to manage. It helps to have a plan. One that many people find easy to remember is called *ABC*. Here is what this means:

**A means Antecedent.** This refers to events that happen just *before* an upsetting action.

**B is the Behavior.** This means any upsetting or aggressive *action done* by the person who has Alzheimer's disease.

**C refers to the Consequence.** This includes events that happen *after* the behavior. Sometimes, these events can make the situation worse.

Here is a story about people we are calling Mary and Robert Jones. In this story, Mary is the caregiver for her husband, Robert, who has Alzheimer's disease. As you will see, in this story many things go wrong.

### **A. The Antecedent. What happened before the behavior?**

*Mary slept too late and now is in a hurry. She wants her husband Robert to quickly get out of bed, take a shower, eat, and get dressed before a driver arrives to take them to his doctor's appointment. Because of her late start, Mary yanks off the bed covers and yells at Robert to get up. He does not understand the words but reacts to her tone of voice. Mary gets angry when he pulls the bed covers back up. "So that's the way it will be. I'm in charge here," she yells.*

*Mary then drags Robert out of bed and rushes to get him dressed. Now he must balance on one leg rather than sit down to pull up his pants. This is not their usual routine when Mary takes her time helping Robert get ready for the day.*

### **B. The Behavior.**

*Robert loses his balance because Mary is rushing him so much. He grabs her arm for support and does not let go. When she yells, he grabs even tighter. Robert is now digging his nails into Mary's arm.*

### C. The Consequence. The events that followed the behavior.

Mary loses control and smacks Robert in the face (something she had never done before). He hits her back. Mary thinks he is fighting, though it may be that he is just afraid and doing to her what she did to him.

One problem leads to others and Mary now worries that Robert will hurt her again. She questions whether she can care for him at home and wonders whether Robert must go to a nursing home.



Now let's look again at this story using the ABC way. Mary can see that the problems started when she rushed around and did not think of how Robert would react. She now knows she must avoid these types of situations.

- Mary learned that because Robert has Alzheimer's disease, he **cannot be rushed**. While she should not feel guilty, she should realize how her actions made this worse.
- If Mary is ever late again, she will call the doctor's office and ask if they can make a new appointment or come in later in the day. This is better than expecting Robert to change his behavior.
- Mary will make a list of what happened just before Robert's upsetting behavior. She will look for causes of what went wrong and figure out ways to avoid them.
- Mary will also think about her own actions and what did or did not work well.
- Mary will use the ABC way to help Robert to be more cooperative in the future. This is a way to understand

what happened and figure out ways to better manage in the future.

Source: *The Comfort of Home for Alzheimer's Disease*

#### Sleep Disturbances

Changes in the brain can alter the sleep patterns of people with dementia. Having a daily schedule with enough activity and periods of rest, avoiding caffeine in the later part of the day, and sticking to a regular time for going to bed may help. Sleep medications should be used only as a last resort. Discuss them with the doctor before using them.

Sometimes the person with Alzheimer's disease will want to sleep in the clothes he has worn during the day. He may prefer to sleep in a comfortable chair in the living room instead of in bed. If there is no harm in going along with these behaviors, do not make an issue about them. However, be sure that the house is securely locked so if the person wakes up and wants to go outside during the night, he cannot do so.

## Taking Care of Yourself— Self-Neglect

Neglect is defined as providing inadequate food, water, clothing, shelter, or help with personal hygiene and health care. However,

**self-neglect** is one of the most frequently reported concerns brought to adult protective services. Oftentimes, the problem is paired with declining health, isolation, Alzheimer's or dementia, or drug and alcohol dependency. Self-neglect can include behaviors such as:

- ☞ Hoarding of objects, newspapers, mail, etc., or animal hoarding to the extent that the safety of the person is threatened. Inability to attend to housekeeping.
- ☞ Failure to provide adequate food and nutrition for oneself and to take essential medications or refusal to seek medical treatment for serious illness.
- ☞ Poor hygiene or not wearing suitable clothing for the weather.

Source: National Center on Elder Abuse

## Live Life Laughing!

Can you redirect all that anger into knitting?



## Inspiration

*A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.*  
— Walter Winchell

## Memory Care - Alcohol

Individuals with moderate dementia may not remember how much they drank and may inadvertently partake in heavy drinking without even realizing it.

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## SAFETY TIPS— Steps to Avoid Injury

Don't try to restrain the person with Alzheimer's disease (AD). This could cause serious injury to both of you.

1. Get out of striking distance. Step away so that he cannot reach you.
2. Call for help if you need it. You can call a friend, family member, or neighbor to help you get the person calmed down. You can also call 911 or your local emergency number.
3. Try to avoid creating a situation in which the person with AD will feel threatened because this will only make him more upset. When things have calmed down figure out what has set the person off using the ABC method on pages 1-2.

What seems like violent behavior may be the way this person is responding to changes in his brain or to events that he doesn't understand and interprets as dangerous in some way. These might be an unfamiliar person entering the room, attempts to take something away from him or fear of being hurt.

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## Q U I C K   Q U I Z

Before hostility builds to the breaking point, anger and frustration must be addressed and healthy outlets found as a way to let off steam. If they are not, angry situations can become physically or emotionally abusive. Answer True or False to the questions below.

1. “Consequence” includes events that happen *after* the behavior.  
T F
2. A person with Alzheimer’s disease may sometimes act in ways that are upsetting or seem aggressive.  
T F
3. These aggressive actions can be upsetting and are often hard for caregivers to manage. It helps to have a plan for how to deal with them.  
T F
4. People with Alzheimer’s or dementia *always* hit, scratch, or fight with the caregiver.  
T F
5. “Antecedent” means what happened *just before* an upsetting action.  
T F
6. Problems can get started when a caregiver rushes and does not think of how the person with Alzheimer’s will react. A person with Alzheimer’s cannot be rushed.  
T F
7. It is important to try to understand why the person may be behaving in ways you find difficult and learn how to avoid making them worse.  
T F
8. *Neglect* is defined as providing inadequate food, water, clothing, shelter, or help with personal hygiene and health care.  
T F
9. What seems like violent behavior may be the way this person is responding to changes in his brain or to events that he doesn’t understand and interprets as dangerous in some way.  
T F
10. Don’t try to restrain the person as this could cause serious injury to both of you.  
T F

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_