



Dealing with Challenging Behaviors

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Every behavior happens for a reason. It is important to understand this. The difficulty comes about when you don't know why?

As a caregiver, it becomes even more difficult because you've probably had a long relationship with this person and it is really difficult to cope with the person changing. They may have been loving and caring in the past, but now you see them as some type of monster who has outbursts of behavior that are so uncharacteristic.

Or it could be the other way round. They have been difficult for much of the time you have known them and now they are very passive. No matter the situation, you have to deal with your own emotions as well which can be very difficult.

To identify what is happening, the tools below may be helpful to you. It will take a little bit of work, but by honestly answering the questions below, it could make it easier for you to manage.

Please note, anything you come up with here does not make you right or wrong. Try your best to look at the situation objectively which is the most effective way for dealing with the challenging behavior.

1. What is the behavior that is challenging?

There are many reasons behaviors challenge people. Some people don't like the term "challenging behaviors" but the truth is the change in your environment is challenging either you, the person with the illness, or someone else in the home. By naming what the "challenging" part is, you can begin to understand see what is truly happening.

2. What leads up to the behavior?

Try and identify what happened before the behavior started. Was the person frustrated and not being able to do something or express themselves? Were you trying to get them to do something they didn't want to do? Start to take notice of what the possible triggers of the behavior may be. If you do that, you may be able to avoid repeating such situations again.

3. Who is affected by the behavior?

Could the way you are feeling or behaving actually add fuel to the fire? People with memory loss or mental impairment are often very sensitive to emotions. In fact, they are often ruled by their emotions. They will act on their feeling and not be able to rationalize the situation. If you are tired and stressed with 24/7 care, and frustrated, then it is

possible your loved one is responding to your emotions and feel trapped because they don't have the ability to do anything about it.

Is it only you that is affected by what is going on in the home? Are there other frustrated members of the family or can some of them manage better than others? Sitting down with them and discussing how they cope with their frustrations may help you to see the situation in a different way.

4. Is there any time of the day the behavior is worse?

If you know that it is going to happen at a regular or semi-regular time of the day, then you can put in strategies to prevent or minimize the behaviors that are upsetting you. If it is later in the afternoon, maybe taking the person for a walk or drive in the car may calm them down. If you can recognize any patterns, then you can plan your day and activities with them at this time.

5. How does this behavior affect you?

Do some soul searching and explore why you are so affected by it? Is it because you have lost your mate and you are finding it difficult to reconcile? Is it because you are finding it difficult being more housebound? Are you living in fear that they may resent you or lash out at you? Is it because you had lots of things planned to do together and now you can't?

6. Why does it affect you this way?

Does their behavior remind you of someone else in your life that has behaved in a similar way that used to upset you? Is it because you are frightened of them? Is it because you are resentful? Is it because this is not the person you knew and are finding it difficult to cope?

When you understand some of these questions, you may be able to start finding some answers for yourself. The most important thing to realize is that there is a reason for the change in behavior, be it good or bad.

If it is a good change then you won't run into as many challenges. If the behavior is not so good, but you make the effort to find the reason or trigger, you will be better able to cope.

Remember, you are only human and all humans react to all situations differently. There is no right or wrong. Be kind to yourself and see how you can help yourself first. When you do that, the person you are looking after will also be more inclined to settle. If this is not the case, don't beat yourself up. You can only do your best. No one can do any more than that.