

Worksheet 11:

Common Core Principles for Supporting People with Dementia – Principle 5

Produced jointly by Skills for Care and Skills for Health, the ‘Common Core Principles for Supporting People with Dementia’ can be used to support better understanding and practice for anyone supporting a person with dementia in any domestic, health or social care setting. Principle 5 states that we should:

“Recognise the signs of distress resulting from confusion and respond by diffusing a person’s anxiety and supporting their understanding of the events they experience.”

Context

People with dementia can find that unfamiliar situations become very confusing and they often struggle with changes to their environment and routines. They may not perceive the environment or other people’s actions in the same way as we do. This may lead to uncharacteristic behaviour that is difficult to understand and manage.

Access to structured activities and personal interaction will support people to participate socially and reduce the frustration that may lead to challenging behaviour. Guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE/SCIE 2006, 2007; NICE 2008) states that medication to reduce challenging behaviour should only be given in exceptional circumstances and should be reviewed on a regular basis (at least monthly). At review, reduction or cessation of the medication should be actively considered. While prescription of antipsychotics is appropriate for a certain small cohort of people who will derive some benefit from the treatment, evidence shows that for the majority of people with dementia these drugs can be counterproductive.

Person-centred care is key to supporting people with dementia and any challenging behaviour. This approach recognises that behaviours often have underlying causes. To support this, health and social care staff should try to understand the personal history of the person and their life story in order to address the causes of challenging behaviour.

Indicative behaviours that should be demonstrated by everyone supporting a person with dementia:

- Be aware that challenging behaviour can be managed and supported in a variety of different ways, not just through the use of anti-psychotic drugs
- Be able to support people with dementia in a person-centred way, which should help you identify any triggers that cause challenging behaviour; always consider whether there is an unmet need that is causing the challenging behaviour

- Be able to identify the cause of confusion or any unmet needs that may be causing challenging behaviour
- Try to remember that all behaviour is a reaction to a feeling – try to understand why someone may feel the way they do

We should be aware that the following could cause challenging behaviour among people living with dementia:

- Misunderstanding their environment
- Feeling frustrated at being unable to understand others or make themselves understood
- Feeling frightened
- Loss of inhibitions, self-control and decreased awareness of rules about appropriate behaviour
- Responding to what they feel to be over-controlling care
- Past history and experiences – being in pain, including chronic pain
- Your or others' responses to their actions

You can support a person with challenging behaviour by following the approach suggested by Alzheimer's Society:

1. Find ways to react calmly if challenging behaviour has occurred
2. Work out what triggers the aggressive behaviour
3. Tackle the triggers
4. Take time to manage your own feelings
5. Be creative in finding alternative activities to help a person move on from feelings of anxiety