

Caring for Yourself While Caring for Others

Module 5: Tips for Maintaining Health and Safety With Clients With Dementia



PARTICIPANT HANDOUT

Practical Tips for Homecare Workers

STAY SAFE AT WORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health



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Learning Objectives:

By the end of this training, you will be able to do the following:

- Identify the health and safety risks of working with people with dementia.
- Explain factors that contribute to clients with dementia becoming agitated and potentially dangerous to themselves and you.
- Discuss approaches to staying physically safe when working with clients with dementia.
- Apply effective calming techniques when clients become potentially dangerous.

Workshop at a Glance

Activity	Time
1. Welcome and Introductions—Understanding Dementia	15 minutes
2. Understanding the Risks When Working With People With Dementia	15 minutes
3. Keeping the Physical Environment and Activities as Safe as Possible	20 minutes
4. Physically Interacting With People With Dementia to Keep Them Calm	15 minutes
5. Promoting Calm and Positive Interactions With People With Dementia	45 minutes
6. Responding When a Person With Dementia Poses a Danger	10 minutes
Total Time	2 hours

Understanding Dementia

Symptoms of Dementia:

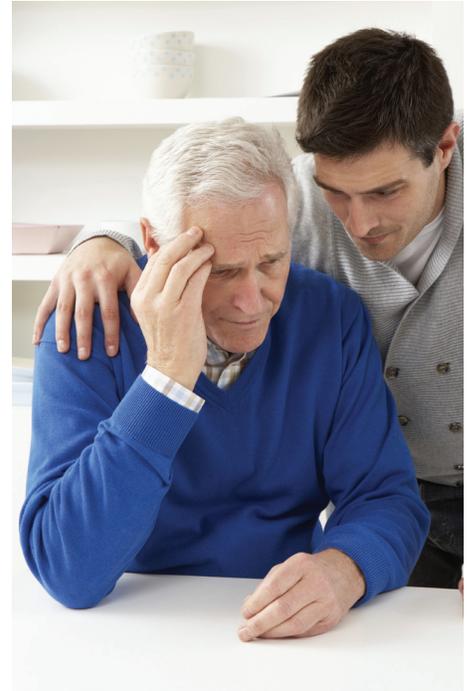


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Behaviors and Reactions That Create Health and Safety Risks:



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Keeping the Physical Environment as Safe as Possible

Minimize changes to the physical environment—changes can add to confusion and agitate some people with dementia.

With that understanding, do make changes to increase safety—after reaching agreement with clients or their caregivers—in ways that cause the least disturbance.



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1. Arrange furniture to ensure clear pathways and easy access.
2. Keep the environment uncluttered of loose items, particularly breakable items, and sharp objects.
3. Remove loose rugs and seal up carpet edges that can cause tripping.
4. Maintain lighting, temperature, and sound levels that are comfortable and soothing for clients.
5. Put night-lights or lights activated by motion in hallways, bathrooms, and other rooms.
6. Use visual cues, such as having contact names and numbers in large print by phones.
7. Dispose of, or safely store, all medications and hazardous materials.
8. Avoid using electric blankets and hot water bottles.
9. Install automatic shut-off mechanisms for kettles and other appliances.
10. Check appliances, such as heaters or toasters, for hazards, and unplug when not in use.
11. Replace long electrical cords on appliances with coiled or retractable cords.
12. Keep hot water temperature at 110–120° to avoid burns in showers and sinks.
13. Install and maintain smoke detectors with loud alarms and fire extinguishers.
14. Close, lock, or put safety catches on doors to high-risk areas such as basements, cabinets, doors to the outside.



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Keeping Activities as Safe as Possible

1. Conduct activities at the time of day the person is most alert and calm.
2. Assess clients before beginning activities to see how they are feeling.
3. Use short words and phrases, and put the most important words first.
4. Keep instructions simple.
5. Take one step at a time—break activities down into individual steps.
6. Use hand gestures to demonstrate tasks to be done.
7. Clearly and respectfully make requests. Do not give orders.
8. Ask only one question at a time.
9. Give the client extra time to respond. Do not interrupt, but allow the client to interrupt you.
10. Modify your expectations as clients express or show such signs as distress, fatigue, embarrassment, or agitation.
11. Keep your emotional energy, body language, and tone calm, warm, and encouraging.
12. Keep content to a minimum.
13. Shift from one activity to another slowly.
14. Be consistent in the approach you use for doing activities.



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Tools that can help keep you and clients healthy and safe:

- Hand-held shower hoses.
- A shower chair or bath seat.
- Rails at bath, shower, and toilet.
- Easy-to-read clocks and large calendars.
- Reminder timers.
- Heat sensors or alarms may help in case of emergency.

Physical Approaches to Maximize Health and Safety

Do's!	Don'ts!

Did We Think of These “Do’s” for Physical Approaches?

- **Approach clients from the front.**
 - Coming up from behind clients can startle them.
- **Go slowly.**
 - Give them time to get used to what is happening around them before you start something new.
 - Avoid sudden or forceful movements.
- **Sit or come low so you are eye-to-eye.**
 - Place yourself so you are at eye level or lower. If you can’t squat, sit in a chair. When people are sitting down and you stand over them, they can feel powerless and trapped.
- **Move to their side.**
 - Some people may feel attacked when you speak to or touch them from the front.
- **Give the client space.**
 - Respect the client’s personal space. When you are interacting with people with dementia, watch their reactions to see how close they want you to be.
- **Call them by the names you learn they prefer.**
 - Ask what each person prefers to be called. Use “Mr.” or a version of “Ms.” to demonstrate respect until given permission to use other names.
- **Look into their faces and make eye contact.**
 - This shows that you are listening. Clients can understand you better when they see your lips move along with the look on your face.
- **Let them take your offered hand.**
 - Hold out your hand, palm open and up. Let them take your hand. This helps them make eye contact and follow your lead.
- **Be careful about touching.**
 - No matter how gentle you are, people with dementia may feel threatened when you touch them. As you come to know clients well, you will be able to assess when and how touching may be positive and soothing.

“3Rs Strategy” Promotes Positive Verbal Interactions

To keep interactions safe and healthy, it is critical to **remain calm**, especially when clients become confused and upset. Focus on the **3Rs Strategy**:

1. Respond 2. Reassure 3. Redirect

Respond

- Accept what people are experiencing or thinking. Do not argue with them.
- **Do not** use logic or reasoning to prove to them that they are wrong.
- Assess their emotions from their behaviors, body language, tone, and words.
- Focus on responding to their emotions, highlighting the positive, if possible.
- If asked a question, give a direct answer that does not make the client more distressed.

Client says, “Where’s my daughter? She should be here!” You respond: “She’s working now. You love when she comes to visit, don’t you?”

Reassure

- Name the emotions or concerns they express to let them know you hear and value what they are saying and feeling, and that you will do your best to support them.
- Check to see if something in the environment is contributing to any stress or negative feelings and address it.

Client says, “I do! She should be here!” You respond: “You miss her when she’s not here, don’t you? Would you like anything to make you more comfortable?”

Redirect

Draw attention to activities or subjects that you know are pleasant to the clients.

- Offer multiple options until people find a new and positive focus—food, music, hobbies, helping with a task to be done.
- Be patient and respectful.
- Encourage clients to look in a new way at issues that confuse or upset them.
- Possibly change the surroundings.

Client says, “No! I’m fine. Where’s my daughter?” You respond: “I think she’ll be visiting later. Let’s have a nice time until then. How about a cup of tea?”

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Positive Interactions With People With Dementia

1	2	3	4
Mrs. McCarthy thinks she has to leave for work. She's trying to get up without her walker so she can go to work. "They need me there! Nothing gets done without me! I can't be late." She hasn't worked in more than 5 years.	You are making dinner. Mr. Pelton wants to help you cook. He wanders into the kitchen and immediately goes to the knife block, saying, "I can cut up the meat. You know, I'm a great cook. I have parties for friends all the time."	Ms. Schwartz seemed ready for her bath, but as you start the water, she cries out, "No! Who are you? Don't you dare touch me! I won't!"	Mr. Castle has been anxious all the morning. Now he calls out, "Who is that? Why is that man staring at me? Look in the corner! Who is he?" There is no one else in the house.

Your Response: _____

Client's Answer: _____

Your Reassurance: _____

Client's Answer: _____

Your Redirection: _____

Responding When a Person With Dementia is Posing a Danger

People with dementia can, at times, become physically aggressive and create a risk to the health and safety of themselves, homecare workers, and others. This can happen because of the following reasons:

- They are experiencing pain or discomfort from a physical condition they cannot identify or explain, such as hunger or urinary tract infection.
- They are feeling stress from something in their environment, such as the level of noise, activity, other stimuli, or the temperature.
- They have had stressful interactions with others.
- They are suffering from delusions, paranoia, or other impacts from their dementia.

Know your employer's policies and practices for handling these situations, as well as the plans made by your clients, their families, or their caregivers.

If a client behaves in a way that poses a threat ...

- Stand to the client's side to protect yourself from direct hits.
- Stand with your feet 18 inches apart so you have a balanced stance in case the client becomes aggressive.
- If possible, keep a distance of 6 feet to minimize the chance that the person will feel threatened by you.
- Avoid touching the client.
- Keep the client and others as safe as you can:
 - Remove objects from the environment that could cause harm.
 - Accompany him if he tries to leave.
 - Respond, Reassure and Redirect her away from dangerous areas.
- Call the client's family or other caregivers for help.
- Call your supervisor.
- Call 911 if necessary.