

De-Escalation in Dementia Care

Why De-Escalation Matters

- Responsive behaviours are a form of communication, often linked to unmet needs such as pain, hunger, boredom, or fear.
- How we respond can either calm the moment or make it more difficult.
- De-escalation protects safety, dignity, and trust

Understanding Risk

When behaviour feels unsafe or concerning, pause and ask: What is the bigger risk?

- **Safety vs. dignity** - is stopping the behaviour safer, or is it taking away independence unnecessarily?
- **Control vs. compassion** - are we trying to “correct” the person, or support them with care?
- **Short-term compliance vs. long-term trust** - does this response make future cooperation harder?

Pause Assess Respond

- **Pause** before reacting.
- **Assess**: What is the person trying to communicate? What is the environment telling us?
- **Respond** calmly with compassion and redirection.

Key Reminders

People with dementia **cannot change their behaviour**, we must adapt ours.

Slow down, listen, validate feelings, and re-approach if needed.

Focus on **unmet needs, safety, and dignity** to maintain calm and connection – at home or in a care setting.

Communication Strategies

Verbal Tips

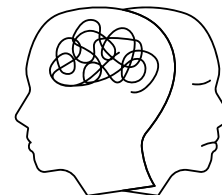
- **Avoid escalating words**: “No,” “You can’t,” “Don’t,” correcting, rationalizing, or forcing reality.
- **Use supportive words**: “Let’s go...” (inviting), connect with personal interests, compliments, validation, gentle reassurance.

Non-Verbal Tips

- **Tone of voice**: keep it calm, slow, and reassuring.
- **Body language**: approach from the front, keep posture open, avoid sudden movements.
- **Personal space**: stand at a respectful distance but remain present.
- **Pacing**: give extra time for the person to respond before repeating.
- **Remember**: people living with dementia respond as much to how we act as to what we say

Enviromental Considerations

- Keep spaces safe and uncluttered.
- Minimize overstimulation: reduce background noise, adjust lighting.
- Sensory Stimulation: soft music, natural light, familiar scents.
- At home: offer a “quiet space” or familiar retreat spot.



Resources:

[Alzheimer Society of Canada - Responsive Behaviours](#)

[Alzheimer Society of Canada - Communication](#)