
Safety Plan for Caregivers

Alzheimer's disease and related dementias can cause a person to act in different and unpredictable ways including shouting, name calling, hitting or pushing. These behaviors can occur suddenly, with no apparent reason, or can result from a frustrating situation. Individuals may become suspicious of those around them or may misinterpret what he or she sees and hears. When the person with dementia is not easily calmed or distracted and violent behavior escalates, your first obligation is to protect yourself and the individual. The Alzheimer's Association can provide guidance to coach you through challenging situations and link you to appropriate support. Call the 24/7 Helpline to speak to a trained dementia specialist (800.272.3900)

Managing aggressive conflicts in the moment:

- Assess the level of danger — for yourself and the person with dementia. When the person with dementia is highly agitated, avoid harm by simply stepping back and standing away from the person. Go to another room, to the garage or outside the house. If available, take a cell or portable phone with you in case you need to call for help. Before returning, call the person with dementia to assess their tone of voice and mood. If he/she still sounds agitated, do not get close to him/her.
- Call 911 if you are unable to calm him/her, or you fear for their safety or yours. Explain the person has dementia and you need assistance. Although not available in all communities, you may ask if the police department has a CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) Officer with specialized training in handling challenging situations who could come to the home. The police officer will attempt to calm the person with dementia, and if not successful, will help get the person to the emergency department for evaluation. If the individual has already calmed down by the time the police officer comes to the home, the officer will look around at the physical environment and assess the situation. Even if they cannot find any evidence of agitated behavior, a report will be made of the call to the house. Each time the police are called to the house, a report is made. These reports may be helpful in the future.
- Do not attempt to transport an agitated or paranoid individual to the doctor or hospital yourself, as he/she may attempt to escape the vehicle or might strike out at you while you are driving.
- If you need to leave the house for your personal safety and it is unsafe for the individual to be alone in the house, call the police. Also, call Adult Protective Services at 1-800-392-0210 (Missouri) or 1-800-642-5429 (Illinois) to inform them of the situation.
- If your safety is at risk and the person is still competent and refuses to go to the hospital, an assisted living or nursing home, the individual may need to be removed from the home and you may need to seek an Order of Protection issued by a court of law. Once the person has been removed from the home and you are safe, the Alzheimer's Association can provide guidance and support. Call the 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900 for assistance.
- Anyone experiencing behavioral symptoms should receive a thorough medical checkup, especially when symptoms appear suddenly. Treatment depends on a careful diagnosis, determining possible causes and the types of behavior the person is experiencing.

Avoiding aggressive conflicts:

- Do not argue with the person with dementia. Acknowledge that he/she seems upset. Be sure your voice is calm and reassuring. Attempt to stay calm yourself.
- Be positive and reassuring. Speak slowly in a soft tone. Use helpful language, “I apologize,” “I am sorry you’re upset,” “I know it’s hard.”
- When responding to hallucinations, be cautious. React calmly and quickly with reassuring words and a comforting touch. Do not argue with the person about what he or she sees or hears. If the behavior is not dangerous or upsetting to the individual, there may not be a need to intervene
- Do not overwhelm the person with “why” questions or give too many instructions at one time.
- Try to turn the person’s attention to music, conversation or activities you enjoy together: “Dad, the office is closed today. Why don’t we have a bowl of ice cream and watch the ball game”
- Provide ways of releasing tension, such as a safe area for the person to pace, a suitable physical activity, or a favorite food or beverage.
- Appeal to memory of “higher authority,” (“Your doctor would want you to do this,” “Reverend Jones is expecting that of you.”)

General safety plan tips:

- Remove or disable guns or any object that could be easily used as a weapon. The presence of a weapon in the home of a person with dementia may lead to unexpected danger. Dementia can cause a person to mistakenly believe that a familiar person is an intruder.
- Keep a list readily available of emergency phone numbers and addresses for local police and fire departments, hospitals and poison control helplines
- Inform a trusted neighbor, family member or friend of the situation; enlist them to call the person when they are agitated to provide a distraction. They could also provide a safe haven if you need to leave the home.
- Contact the Alzheimer’s Association for guidance and support:
 - Call the 24/7 Helpline (800.272.3900) for guidance and to schedule a care consultation, a free one-on-one appointment with a trained dementia specialist, to help you clarify next steps and learn how to live with the disease.
 - Visit the website to learn more about dementia, behaviors and safety (www.alz.org/stl)
 - Join our online message board community at www.alzconnected.org. There is a special caregiver forum and a forum specifically for people living with Alzheimer's to connect with others and share support.
 - Go to our free online tool, www.alzheimersnavigator.org, to receive a customized action plan and step-by-step guidance on topics including driving and home safety.
 - Attend a support group to learn from others going through a similar situation

Sources:

- *Pressure Points: Alzheimer’s and Anger*, 2000, by Edna L. Ballard, Lisa P. Guyther and T. Patrick Toal
- *Behaviors: How to respond when dementia causes unpredictable behaviors* (Alzheimer’s Association brochure)
- Alzheimer’s Association Caregiver Center (www.alz.org/care)