



Caregiver First Aid

How to Calm a Person Who is Agitated or Upset

When a person has memory loss, they may experience periods of feeling anxious, upset or agitated. The symptoms may range from mild to severe and occur infrequently or throughout the day. All of us face challenges every day. Those with diseases that impact the brain have an even harder time managing these daily challenges because their brains aren't working properly. Declining memory, difficulty communicating and increasing confusion can cause a person to become upset. Caregivers often report feeling distressed when they are trying to calm their loved one who is upset or agitated. Here are some strategies that may help.

Put safety first. If your loved one or you are in immediate danger, move to a safe area immediately. Call for help from bystanders if available. Call 911. Most police officers are very understanding and have had special training to help in such situations.

Acknowledge feelings. "I see that you are very worried." "You look very angry."

Ask questions. "Tell me more about what is bothering you." Even if your loved one is having a hard time expressing themselves, it can be calming if they know someone listening and caring.

Offer reassurance. Let them know that you are going to take care of it – whatever it is. They won't have to take care of this alone and you are going to be with them to help.

Accept their reality. If they wake up at 2am frantic about being late for work, tell them the boss called and said the office is closed today. Or if your mom is worried about picking up the children from school, instead of saying "You don't have any children in school" try "They are taking the bus and will be here soon, let's fix them a snack."

Interrupt. Here is a case when the memory loss can work to your advantage – pretend someone is at the door, or just called on the phone. Sometimes the "interruption" can snap a person away from the intense feelings and behaviors. One minute later, they will completely forget that they were upset.

Redirect. After you acknowledge what your loved one is feeling try to get their attention focused on another activity. An activity that involves movement may help to dissipate the negative energy. Take a walk together, invite them to help you prepare dinner, play catch or ask them to help fold the laundry or sweep the floor.

Scan the environment. Is there something in the surrounding area that your loved one is reacting to that you have not noticed – such as loud noise from another part of the house, disturbing images on the television, or too many people talking in the room? If so remove the stimuli.

Seek medical assistance. If you have tried all of these tips and the situation is not improving, it may be time to talk with a Geriatric Psychiatrist, Neurologist or a Geriatrician who specializes in treating memory disorders.

We hope these tips are helpful. For more support in coping with these situations, please call our free, confidential help line. Our trained caregivers have been in your shoes and can help you navigate these waters.