

***Tips on Caregivers working with Persons with Dementia***  
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**Dealing with combative behaviors:**

- Give them space
- Make them comfortable (sometimes combative behaviors are a result of discomfort – being too hot, too cold, thirsty, hungry, scared, tired)
- Ground to a good memory (ex: ask about a person they care about or a memory that was particularly good that they enjoy talking about)
- Offer to help, but don't argue
- Distractive techniques include soothing music, or going to a different room

**Problem-solving behaviors:**

- **Mirrors:** Sometimes people w/dementia don't recognize their image and think the person in the mirror is a stranger. Keep mirrors out of their space.
- **Nightlights:** Nightlights often cast shadows and cause anxiety in persons with dementia, so avoid using them, or if light is needed, avoid ones that cast shadows.
- **Demystify triggers:** If you can identify when a person has a problem and what it appears to be in relation to, you can then identify the trigger and perhaps avoid it.

**Depression:** 40% or more of the elderly are clinically depressed, yet very few are treated for depression because of all of the other medical concerns that often accompany advanced age. However, depression is very important to treat, and small doses of serotonin-reuptake inhibitors like Paxil, etc. can result in significant mood enhancement. Tip: it is very easy for the efficacy of these meds to be compromised – things like Tums or Roloids easily erode the positive effects of these meds. Things that can be done to naturally lift depression include:

- Getting a little full-spectrum lighting, either by using full-spectrum bulbs or by getting out in the sunlight at least a few minutes every day if possible

- Exercise, even in small amounts, can release endorphins which are natural mood elevators
- Smiling, even when you are not happy, can also trigger the release of endorphins!
- Have them do something that makes them feel useful or productive, even small tasks. A person who used to be a health care worker could hand out orange juice when meds are being dispensed; a former teacher could read a book aloud and create 'storytime' at the facility; a person who loved gardening could plant/tend a small flower or vegetable garden; etc.

#### **Memory Problems:**

- Use a bulletin board to post pictures and other important items (repetition of viewing helps enhance memory)
- Have a calendar hanging up with the days marked off as they pass and important events marked on it
- Important items like keys should be in a prominent spot (like a key holder in the kitchen)
- Identifying items can become a problem; create a board with pictures on it that can be pointed to; put a picture of a bathroom or toilet on the bathroom door so the person will remember where it is
- Forget where your room is? Take a picture of the person *from when they were younger* and put it on the door. Sometimes people with dementia don't recognize themselves as being older.

**Delusional Behavior:** There is no arguing someone out of a delusion; it is their reality. If the delusion is causing them distress, problem-solve within the delusional state (i.e. if the situation were true, what would help?) For instance, if a person thinks there are eyes in the palms of their hands, perhaps they could be covered by gloves or soothed closed with lotion.