

Behavioral And Psychological Symptoms Of Dementia: Disinhibition

Sometimes, a person with dementia may lose control over their inhibitions, leading to behaviours that others may find embarrassing or awkward.

Some of these behaviours are:

- Making insensitive or rude remarks, and sharing personal information with strangers.
- Using offensive language that they would not have used before.
- Undressing in public.
- Exhibiting sexual disinhibition, such as touching their genitals in public or making sexual suggestions to others.



Possible causes of disinhibited behaviour include:

- **Disorientation to the surrounding environment or time.**
e.g. unable to find the bathroom, leading to urination in public or an open space.
- **Misidentification.** e.g. mistaking a caregiver for a spouse
- **Discomfort/Unmet needs.** For instance, feeling too hot or cold, or thinking that clothes are too tight, which may result in them removing their clothes. A person touching the genital area might be indicating a need to use the toilet.
- **Loss of understanding of the need for discretion/privacy**
e.g. expression of sexual needs in the public.



Tips on how to manage disinhibited behaviours:

- **Look for the reason behind the behaviour.**
Understanding the behavior in a particular way will help us respond appropriately.
- **React with patience and gentleness.**
Try not to overreact, even though the behaviors may be very embarrassing. Remember that these behaviors are part of the illness.
- **Avoid shaming the person.**
Sexual behavior is a normal physiological human need. If the person with dementia engages in inappropriate sexual behaviours, gently remind them that the behavior is inappropriate. Lead them to a private place or try to distract them with another activity.
- **Adjust their clothes to prevent them from removing them.**
Consider buying pants without zippers or reversing shirts with buttons.
- **Be aware of potential triggers.** If we know what these are, we may be able to prevent the behavior from occurring in the first place.



Contributed by Nursing and Psychology, Allied Health Services

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