



Dealing with Difficult Behavior

If the person you care for must rely on others for his daily care, he may feel a loss of control over his life. He may feel frustrated or helpless at times. His personality and behavior may change because of the emotional and physical changes he experiences.

A person who has always had a difficult personality may become even more difficult with the stress of an illness or disability. When a person becomes sick or disabled, not only his life but the lives of those around him change dramatically. If you can recognize the reasons a person is difficult and learn methods to cope, it will help you both maintain a healthier relationship and get through the trying times.

Coping With A Difficult Behavior

- You can't always control the other person's behavior but you can control your response to it.
- Focus your response on the behavior; avoid blaming it on his personality or condemning him as a "bad" person.
- Don't take the angry behavior personally.
- You're doing the best that you can do in a difficult situation; blaming yourself won't help solve the problem.

Excessive Complaints and Angry Behavior Illness and disability affect everyone differently. Some people who need help from others become easily irritated. They may seem petty and demanding at times. The person may fly into a rage because you put too much cream in his coffee. When he is losing control over parts of his life, he may be desperately looking for something he can still control.

What Can You Do When Someone Acts Unreasonable Or Makes Angry Demands On You?

- **Don't downplay his feelings.** Saying "It's no big deal" won't help, it may even make him angrier. Instead, try something like, "You seem really frustrated. What can we do next time to make it better?"
- **Let him talk about his anger.** "What's making you feel so bad?" "You seem upset, can I help?"

- **Make an effort to respect demands** that may seem petty to you but seem very important to him. Remember, if he could he would change the volume on the radio himself or shave exactly how and when he wanted.
- **Find something to agree about.** “Yes, the mail carrier hasn’t been coming as early as he used to.” “You’re right, these sheets are all wrinkled up.”
- **Give Him Chances To Make Decisions And Be In Control**
“What should we have for breakfast today, oatmeal or eggs?”
“Do you like your bath before breakfast or after?”
- **Look For Patterns To The Angry Behavior.** Maybe the outbursts always come in the late afternoon when he’s more irritable or on days when you’re in a hurry or stressed.
- **Try To Break The Pattern.** If you can avoid the triggers that lead up to an angry outburst you can reduce frustration for both of you.
- **Choose Your Battles.** If you’re making a lot of demands on him about eating, moving, or resting, he may become resentful. Choose what’s really important and let some things go. Anybody could get angry if told to eat everything on their plate.
- **Take A Breather.** If either of you is losing control of the situation, walk away. Take several deep breaths, count to 10, or give a silent scream while both of you cool off.

Anxious Or Demanding Behavior Chronic illness or disability may make the ill person more anxious than usual. He may worry about small details of his medications, his blood pressure or his blood sugar levels. He may make constant or unreasonable demands. He may refuse to allow anyone but you to straighten his bed sheets. Anxiety may make him feel restless or dizzy, he may have hot flashes or chills, or he may feel like his heart is pounding. Anxiety can also cause irritability, depression, insomnia and poor concentration.

If You Care For Someone Who Is Overly Anxious Try The Following:

- **Try to identify in the environment what could make someone anxious** (too much caffeine; watching crime shows on television) and decrease those things.
- **Look for the feelings behind the demands.** A person with breathing problems may demand that windows are open on a cold day because he feels he can't get enough air.
- **Use gentle touch to calm** him. Reassuring him that things are under control while stroking his hand or the back of his neck may help ease the anxious feelings.
- **Accept his need for control.** He may insist that things are kept in a certain place on his bedside table because he doesn't have the energy to get up and get them. Offer reassurances such as "we have enough time" not "everything will be okay". Give him privacy and personal space.

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