

How to respond during a disaster

Tips for caregivers

During an evacuation

People living with dementia are especially vulnerable to chaos and emotional trauma. They have a limited ability to understand what is happening, and they may forget what they have been told about the disaster. Be alert to potential reactions that may result from changes in routine, travelling or new environments.

- When appropriate, inform others (hotel or shelter staff, family members, airline attendants) that your family member is living with dementia and may not understand what is happening.
- Do not leave them alone. It only takes a few minutes to wander away and get lost.
- Be alert to potential reactions including agitation, disorientation and an increase in symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions and sleep disturbance.
- Do your best to remain calm. The person living with dementia will respond to the emotional tone you set.

Tips for preventing agitation

- Reassure them. Hold hands or put your arm on their shoulder. Tell them that things are going to be fine.
- Find outlets for anxious energy. Take a walk together or engage them in simple tasks.
- Redirect their attention if they become upset.
- Move them to a safer or quieter place, if possible. Limit stimulation.
- Make sure they take medications as scheduled.
- Try to schedule regular meals and maintain a regular sleep schedule.
- Avoid elaborate or detailed explanations. Provide information using concrete terms. Follow brief explanations with reassurance.
- Be prepared to provide more help with all routine activities.
- Pay attention to cues that they may be overwhelmed (fidgeting, pacing).
- Remind them that they are in the right place.

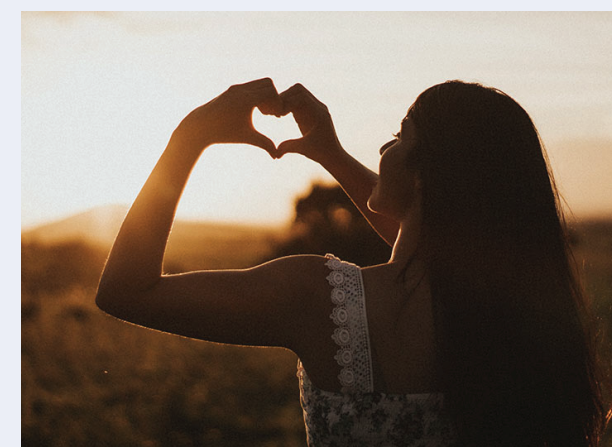
Helpful hints during an episode of agitation

- Approach them from the front and use their name.
- Use calm, positive statements and a patient, low-pitched voice. Reassure.
- Respond to the emotions they are expressing rather than the content of the words. For example, say, "You're frightened and want to go home. It's okay. I'm right here with you."
- Don't argue with them or try to correct. Instead, affirm their experience, reassure them and try to divert their attention. For example, "The noise in this shelter is frightening. Let's see if we can find a quieter spot. Let's look at your photo book together."



Take care of yourself

- Take care of yourself by finding a good listener to hear your thoughts and feelings about the event.
- Find moments to breathe, meditate and reflect.



First Link® Dementia Helpline

English: 1-800-936-6033 Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu: 1-833-674-5003

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