

# Caregiver Assistance News

*"Caring for You - Caring for Others"*

**Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc.**

*Serving Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Pike,  
Ross, Scioto and Vinton Counties in Ohio*

**www.aaa7.org** **Helping You Age Better!**



**SEPTEMBER 2011**

## Dealing with Difficult People

Some people are born complainers. If the person in your care has always been difficult to work with, age isn't going to improve them. A sudden change in personality, from sweet-tempered to angry all the time; however, may be a red flag for other problems such as:

**Medication effects.** Certain medications can cause personality changes in some people while drug interactions can also cause problems. Always have drug combinations checked by a pharmacist. Antidepressants are a big cause of personality changes and the wrong drug can make depression worse. Don't assume things will turn better; talk to a doctor right away. Many older adults with dementia symptoms are sometimes suffering from drug interactions; once the drugs are gone, the dementia disappears!

**Infections.** "Silent" infections, especially bladder or urinary tract infections (UTIs), can affect emotions and personality, even when the person doesn't seem sick.

**Pain.** If you see a sudden change from a sunny disposition to irritable complainer, have a doctor check for painful health conditions. Many older adults "don't want to complain" to a doctor, so they complain to their caregivers all day long.

**Attitude.** Some people believe that age

gives them the right to say whatever they feel - and much of this could be negative if they are bored or feeling unneeded. If the person in your care can be made to understand what they are doing, change could be a possibility.

**Dementia.** Memory issues are what we generally think of in dementia; however, frustration, becoming lost, or not being able to do or recognize familiar things can cause startling personality changes. People with Alzheimer's, Pick's disease, and other dementias need to see a doctor as soon as possible. If the person is developing dementia, new drugs can help ward off the worst personality changes (in some people) for months or even years. Anti-anxiety medications and, for some, antipsychotics, can make a difference.

**Abusive personality.** Unfortunately, a lot of adults grew up in families where they were abused, physically and/or emotionally, all of their lives. Just because they have grown old doesn't mean family relations will change for the better. It's likely that these abusive older adults will be just as abusive to their adult children (and their caregivers!) as they were when they were

younger.

### **Handling Angry Outbursts or Uncooperative Behavior**

To diffuse anger, try:

- Humor: *Make light of the situation, but not the person.*
- Empathy: *"I see how upset you are and I understand."*
- Changing the subject: *Address what they are saying briefly, then move on to a different topic.*
- Taking a break: *Tell the person you have a task to take care of in another room and that you'll discuss the issue in a little while. This will give them time to cool down, as well as give you a chance to take some deep breaths and become centered again.*



## Dealing with Difficult People *(continued)*

### When the Person Refuses to Cooperate

First, make sure they understand what you are asking. They may be confused, especially in cases of dementia, or may be feeling ill and simply unable to respond quickly.

- Make sure they are comfortable: *They may be confused, overstimulated, or in physical pain.*

- Listen: *Ask how they are doing. Sometimes, combative behavior is a symptom of a deeper issue. For example, a person may refuse to be bathed because of embarrassment. Or, they may refuse to eat because they feel they have no control over their life. Giving the person choices can make them more likely to cooperate.*

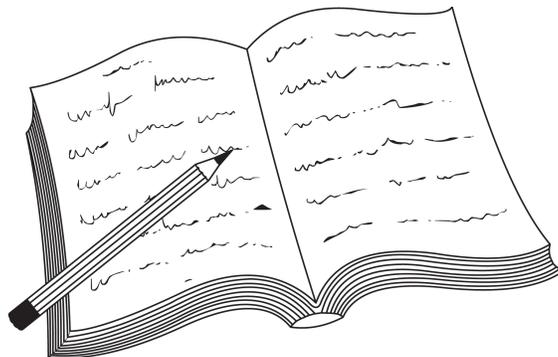
- Be patient: *Your schedule may be overwhelming, but the person in your care is on their own schedule. Allow more time than usual for simple tasks. Too many activities at once can provoke a reaction because the person feels overwhelmed.*

- Remain calm: *Seeing you calm may help them calm down.*

- Delay personal care if possible: *Ask yourself if the task you are attempting can be delayed until the person is calmer.*

- Do not contradict their reality: *If they believe something to be true, do not disagree, unless it poses a physical threat.*

- Track the behavior: *Keep notes on times of day, frequency, or type of behavior problem.*



Want to learn more about home and community-based services and how we can help you?

Call our Resource Center at  
**1-800-582-7277**



### Changing What You Do

You may not be able to control the other person's behavior, but you can control your own. Here's how to appear less confrontational to the person who is agitated:

- Stand beside or at eye level rather than towering over them, especially if several people are tending to them at once.

- Don't expect an immediate answer or response. Give them extra time.

- Keep the room calm. Turn off the TV and radio.

- Speak clearly and slowly.

### Don't Take it Personal

Sometimes, a person's abusive behavior is a symptom of illness or dementia and is not their true nature.

Remember, they may not be able to control their behavior or even be aware of it because of their disease.

*"I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen."*

- Ernest Hemingway -

## *Taking Care of Yourself* - **Anger and Depression Increases Pain**

Anger and sadness hurt. Scientists have found that when people are angry or sad, they feel more pain.

If you, or the person in your care, is in pain, depression or anger can make feelings worse. Many people, especially older adults, tend to hide negative emotions, but keeping sadness or irritation inside can make painful conditions worse. Recognize your emotions and express them in a healthy way that makes you feel better.

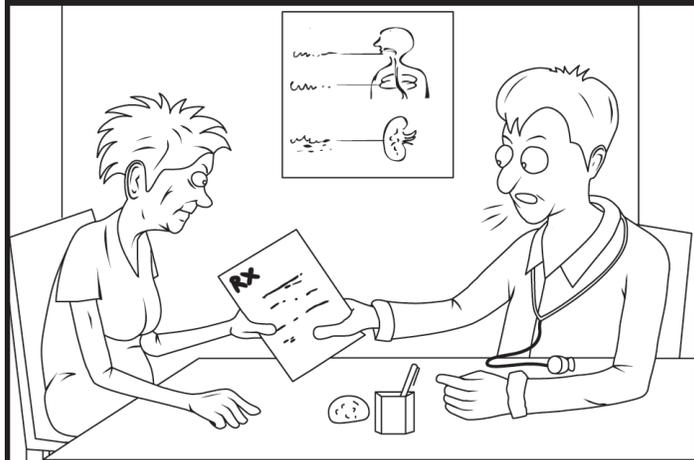
It's normal for a person to be upset or depressed when not feeling well, but in some cases, improving one's mood can make pain less intense. Learning new ways to cope with sadness and anger can help a person cope better with illness, pain and caregiving.

Source: WebMD



**Saying "I'm Sorry" is like giving someone a gift...the gift of using good manners.**

## **Live Life Laughing**



"Your prescription is to laugh every hour.  
More, if necessary."

## **Don't Fall - Be Safe**

*Be aware that sedatives, anti-depressants, and anti-psychotic drugs can contribute to falls by reducing mental alertness, worsening balance and gait, and causing drops in systolic blood pressure while standing.*

*Additionally, people taking multiple medications are at even greater risk of falling.*



## **HALT!**

*Never let yourself become too:*

**H - Hungry**  
**A - Angry**  
**L - Lonely**  
**T - Tired**





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*Your local Area Agency on Aging District 7, Inc. serves the following counties in Ohio: Adams, Brown, Gallia, Highland, Jackson, Lawrence, Pike, Ross, Scioto and Vinton.*

*Services are rendered on a non-discriminatory basis. Those interested in learning more about the services provided through the*

*Area Agency on Aging District 7 can call toll-free at 1-800-582-7277. Here, individuals can talk directly with a nurse or social worker who will assist them with information surrounding the programs and services that are available to best serve their needs. The Agency can also be reached via e-mail at [info@aaa7.org](mailto:info@aaa7.org).*

## When Hostility Builds to a Breaking Point

Control your emotions by releasing anger and frustration in a safe way. Take a walk to cool down, or go to a private corner and unleash your anger on a big pillow.

To find professional help or support-group counseling, check out:

- *The community pages of the phone directory*
- *The local county medical society, which can provide a list of counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists*
- *Religious service agencies*
- *Community health clinics*
- *Clergy*
- *Area Agency on Aging*
- *United Way's "First Call for Help"*
- *A hospital's social service department*
- *A newspaper calendar listing of support group meetings*
- *Parish nurses*
- *Counselors familiar with the needs of caregivers*

