

Dementia Care: Sundowning

Learner Workbook



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SUNDOWNING

People with dementia exhibit some common specific behaviors, meaning how they act and react. Some common behaviors seen in people with dementia include:

- Wandering and elopement
- Sundowning
- Anxiety, agitation, and/or aggression
- Confusion
- Repetition
- Communication difficulties
- Suspicion
- Sleep problems

Difficult behaviors can be related to many things, such as physical discomfort, frustration, complicated tasks, unfamiliar surroundings, or overstimulation in a noisy environment. To help you manage difficult behaviors in a resident, it is helpful to take a three step approach.

1. Remain alert to identify early signs of a developing difficult behavior.
2. Identify possible triggers (e.g., What is happening in the environment, what time of day is it, what is the resident being asked to do and how, etc.?). Document identified triggers.
3. Try a solution and evaluate the outcome. If that solution doesn't work, try another. Document what did/did not work.

As a direct care staff caring for persons with dementia, it is helpful to know how your residents may be affected by dementia. In addition to the general care strategies we discussed above, let's take a look at some specific care strategies for common challenges.

In this module, we will specifically address the behavior found in sundowning.

What Is Sundowning

Sundowning is a behavior frequently seen in residents with dementia. Sundowning refers to a state of confusion at the end of the day and into the night. They may become demanding, suspicious, upset or disoriented, and/or pace or wander.



While experts are unsure how or why sundowning occurs, they suspect that the problem of late afternoon confusion may be due to:

- Fatigue at the end of the day so the person cannot cope with stress as well
- Low lighting that causes the person to become confused
- Increased shadows
- Less activities to keep the person occupied

Confusion and restlessness may occur because the brain can no longer sort the cues in the environment.

Strategies

Some suggestions for direct care staff to lessen the behaviors of sundowning are:

- Make afternoon and evening hours less hectic
- Schedule appointments, trips, and activities such as baths or showers early in the day
- If a resident tends to pace or wander in the evening, you may want to arrange at least one or two brisk walks during the day
- Discourage napping during the day if nighttime sleeplessness is a problem
- Reduce consumption of foods and beverages with caffeine
- Reduce the level of noise from radios or televisions. Confine noisier activities to another area of the Community. Control the number of people who visits in the evening hours
- Provide good lighting to reduce the person's confusion from poor lighting and/or shadows



Activities

An outstanding activity program can be very helpful when managing challenging behaviors. Activities you may implement that our residents with dementia may enjoy include:

- Dancing and/or singing
- Walks around the garden
- Visiting pets
- Reminiscence



It is important to learn and know your resident's preferences and desires. Activities for residents with dementia should be positive and enjoyable.

The way to design activities that are geared for success is by the following:

- Know your resident's limitations
- Know your resident's strengths
- Communicate with the Activity Director
- Plan ahead



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Some of the common behaviors exhibited by residents who experience sundowning include:

- A. Suspicion
- B. Agitation
- C. Confusion or disorientation
- D. Pacing and wandering
- E. All of the above

Explain your answer:



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING: DEMENTIA CARE: SUNDOWNING

Below, list some techniques that a direct care staff may use in order to manage sundowning behavior:

Explain your answer: