

Minnesota State-Wide Association of Activity Professionals  
Managing Behaviors with Positivity  
Alisa Tagg, MS, ACC/EDU, CADDCT, CDP, CDCS, DCS

*Behavior is nothing more than a means to communicate when words are no longer effective.*

It's important to recognize that behaviors are only the tip of the iceberg. Our job is to investigate thoroughly to determine the cause of the behavior and help the individual communicate their needs.

As professionals we need to build a relationship of trust with the resident by the following:

- Know their history.
- Respect their individuality.
- Know their abilities.
- Encourage skill use.
- Provide emotional support and encouragement.

Barriers to Communication:

- Caregiver Barriers
- Environmental Barriers
- Medical Barriers

The ABCs of Behavior:

- A. Antecedent of the Behavior
- B. Behavior
- C. Consequence of the Behavior

**Most Common Mental Disorders:**

*Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder*

*Oppositional Defiant Disorder*

*Reactive Attachment Disorder*

*Major Depressive Disorder*

*Bipolar Disorder, Mania*

## *Schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders*

### *Anxiety Disorder*

### *Dementia of the Alzheimer's Type*

#### **Indications of Mental Health Needs:**

- If a person has persistent troubling emotions that undermine a generally positive experience of life, this is a mental health issue, even if a mental illness has not been diagnosed.
- If a person has persistent troubling emotions that undermine a generally positive experience of life, this is a mental health issue, even if a mental illness has not been diagnosed.
- Difficulty getting along with others is another important indication that a person's mental health needs attention.

#### **Activity Interventions:**

- Animal-assisted therapy
- Therapeutic Art
- Drama club
- Exercise
- Aromatherapy
- Leisure education
- Structured tasks
- Gardening
- Naps
- Social club
- Music engagement
- Equine therapy
- Team-building games
- Journaling
- Mindful meditation
- Guided imagery
- Collage building
- Cognitive stimulation
- Brain games
- Store your groceries
- Draw your head and fill it with words
- Involve the group in chess
- Affirmation and worry stones

- Painting and drawing nature
- Two truths and one lie
- You sound like...
- Put your fear in a hat

### **Is the behavior risky?**

NO

- Let it go
- Leave it alone
- Learn to live with it

YES

- Personal history
- Level of Dementia
- Time of day
- Triggers
- Staff approach

### **Things to avoid when encouraging positive behavior:**

- Nagging
- Arguing
- Repeatedly demanding that the person do (or not do) something.
- Making threats (examples)
- Giving the person a “dose of his or her own medicine)
- Withholding privileges
- Ignoring the individual
- Scolding or reprimanding
- Using punishment
- Defensively insisting that things are not the way the person sees them.
- Laughing at the care recipient by making him or her the butt of jokes
- Engage in power struggles.
- Showing annoyance, frustration, or anger.

### **Allow Choice:**

- Allowing care recipients to make choices can encourage positive behaviors. It is important to support decision making when care recipients are interested and capable of making choices.
- Open-ended questions can help encourage capable and interested individuals to make decisions regarding their treatment, including the care and assistance they receive with activities of daily living, such as bathing, eating, and dressing.
- Limited-choice questions (Yes-and-no and either-or questions) can provide encouragement for people who are less capable or cooperative with necessary care because of confusing or bad moods. They are also helpful when the only choices you can offer are limited. These questions can often encourage positive, cooperative behaviors.

- Very confused or overly stressed people might not make decisions well or may not understand the choices given to them. They may get agitated when given more choices than they can deal with, so it can be helpful to give simple step-by-step explanations of what you are doing and what you need to the person to do. For example, you might say, “I’ll help you put on your shirt. Here we go. Now, put this arm through this sleeve. Very good.” It is important to praise effort and participating to reassure and encourage the person.

### **Soft Approach for Behaviors by Gary Martin, PhD**

- Smile
- Approach from the front
- Use please voice tones (never act impatient, frustrated, or angry)
- Go slow (never rush, push, or act abrupt)
- Talk, using short, simple, concrete words and sentences.
- Give and go one step at a time.
- Act respectful.
- Treat the person with dignity.
- Never correct or confront.

When the person becomes upset with a task

- Stop the task.
- Re-establish rapport.
- Redirect attention away from the upset.
- Agree, apologize, and/or act dumb.
- Re-approach using the soft approach.

*The only behavior we can ever really change is our own.*

To learn more contact Alisa at [alisa@naap.info](mailto:alisa@naap.info)