

# Managing Changes: Emotions and Behaviour

Also available in Italian | Disponibile anche in italiano

This is a resource for the Italian community. It was developed together with caregivers of people living with dementia within the Italian community in Canada. A caregiver could be a family member, friend, or another person who is supporting a person living with dementia.

## This resource provides information about:

- ✓ Common changes with emotions and behaviour, and related strategies for people living with dementia and caregivers
- ✓ Supports and services including the family doctor, medication, counselling, and behavioural support services



## Changes with emotions and behaviour

Some people living with dementia experience changes with their emotions and behaviour. This might include becoming easily frustrated or upset, feeling anxious or sad, seeing things that are not there, believing things that are not true, or losing motivation.

As dementia progresses, a person may experience challenges with communicating. As a result, they may express their needs using words, actions or expressions that are confusing, hard to understand, or different from their usual behaviour. **It is important to remember the person living with dementia is not behaving differently on purpose. They may be trying to tell you something they can no longer say with words.** For example, they may be worried, upset, hungry, thirsty, uncomfortable, in pain, or need to go to the bathroom.

If the person living with dementia shows sudden or persistent changes in their behaviour, it is important to talk with your family doctor. There may be medical causes for the changes such as infections or medication side effects.

Changes in emotions and behaviour can be stressful to manage. There are strategies and services that can help. Not all strategies will work for everyone, and what works one day may not work another day. Find strategies and adapt them to work for your situation. Caregivers may also benefit from services to help them to cope or to take a break. Visit [forwardwithdementia.ca](https://forwardwithdementia.ca) to **Learn About Programs and Services.**

What you might notice:	Strategies for people living with dementia:	Strategies for caregivers:
<p><b>Becoming more easily frustrated or upset</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a deep breath, try to stay calm, and take a break from the situation if needed.</li> <li>• Talk to your family and friends about how they can help you to stay calm during frustrating situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a calm environment and reduce distractions.</li> <li>• Take a deep breath and try to stay calm. Getting frustrated or raising your voice may make things worse, even if you used to communicate this way.</li> <li>• Take a break from the situation or use respite services if needed.</li> <li>• Acknowledge the emotions. For example, “I can see why you are frustrated.”</li> <li>• Ignore “inappropriate” language or swearing.</li> <li>• Try to redirect the person to a new topic or activity.</li> </ul>

**“My mom gets frequent urinary tract infections. She doesn’t know how to tell us she’s uncomfortable, so it manifests in anger or frustration.”**

- Caregiver from the Italian community

What you might notice:	Strategies for people living with dementia:	Strategies for caregivers:
<p><b>Feeling anxious or sad</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create and stick to a daily routine to help reduce feelings of uncertainty.</li> <li>● Find activities that improve your mood and help you relax. For example, exercise, being in nature, listening to music, or calling a friend.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create a consistent daily routine together.</li> <li>● Talk with the person about what they find comforting. For example, a favourite song, prayer, looking at photo albums and reminiscing, holding hands.</li> <li>● Try changing the environment. For example going for a walk or drive, or to a place the person enjoys.</li> <li>● <b>Avoid</b> insisting on activities if the person is tired or frustrated.</li> </ul>

“Sometimes at night, my mom will ask my dad to turn down the television because the ‘kids are sleeping’. It is easier for my dad to go along with it and turn it down rather than argue that there are no kids sleeping.”

- Caregiver from the Italian community

**What you might notice:**

**Seeing things that are not there (for example, bugs on the wall), or believing things that are not true (for example, someone is in the house)**

**Strategies for people living with dementia:**

- Talk with your family members or people you live with to identify things in your home that may be misperceived. For example, changing the wallpaper if the pattern resembles bugs.

**Strategies for caregivers:**

- Schedule regular hearing and vision tests and ensure glasses and hearing aids are worn.
- Consult with your doctor to rule out medical causes
- Stay calm.
- Acknowledge emotions and offer reassurance. For example, “I know you’re worried. I will make sure the door is locked.”
- Try to direct the person to a new location, or a more pleasant topic or activity.
- **Avoid** arguing, correcting or trying to convince the person they are wrong. The way a person living with dementia sees or understands a situation might be different from the way you do.

**What you might notice:**

**Strategies for people living with dementia:**

**Strategies for caregivers:**

**Losing motivation or not starting tasks**

- Create and stick to a daily routine. Use a large calendar or white board that you can see easily.
- Try to schedule activities when you are well rested.
- Ask a friend or family member to do the activity or task with you.
- Try out new activities, even if you are not sure about them.

- Help the person to get the task started.
  - Provide one instruction at a time. For example, “It’s time to wake up”, rather than “you need to get out of bed, and shower before breakfast”.
  - Offer limited choices. For example, “would you like to wear the blue shirt or the green shirt?”
  - Emphasize the positive aspects of the task. For example, “We should sweep the floor so the house is clean for our visitors.”
  - Encourage the person to participate in activities they enjoy, and attend with them if possible.
- Visit [forwardwithdementia.ca](http://forwardwithdementia.ca) to **Learn About Programs and Services**

## Supports and services

Talk to your family doctor or other healthcare provider if you have concerns about how you or your friend or family member are feeling. They may discuss counselling or medication options to address mood concerns. You can also make adjustments to your lifestyle that may improve your mood. Visit [forwardwithdementia.ca](http://forwardwithdementia.ca) for non-medical strategies related to **Having Hope and Living Well**.

**Behavioural support services** help people develop strategies to manage changes in behaviour that can occur as dementia progresses. **Ask your family doctor or Alzheimer Society support staff for information.**



## Notes

Use this space to write down any notes, reflections, or questions you have about this resource.