

Australian version

iSupport For Dementia

Training and support manual
for carers of people with dementia



Unit 7. Changes in judgement

Why is this unit important?

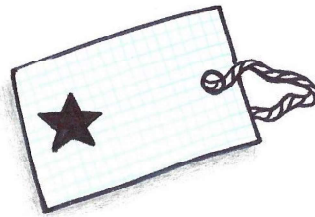
Changes in judgement can be upsetting for the person with dementia and the carer.

How will this unit help me?

This learning unit will help you understand the reasons for changes in judgement and teach you skills to manage.

What will I learn?

- Changes in judgement increases as dementia progresses
- How to reduce or prevent changes in judgement
- How to plan for increasing levels of changes in judgement in the future.



What is changes in judgement?

Changes in judgement may include saying the wrong thing at the wrong time, acting inappropriately in a situation, or not understanding one's own limitations.

Usually these actions are not harmful, but they can be stressful or embarrassing for the person with dementia and/or the carer. People with dementia are often looking for guidance or reassurance.

Activity



Did you ever notice that the person you care for sometimes has changes in judgement?

What did the person you care for do?

Describe it here:

How did it affect you as the person providing care?

Note



Please note that changes in judgement can increase as dementia progresses. In this learning unit, you can practice several ways to respond to changes in judgement and find out what may help.

Saying the wrong thing in public
Let's go through an example.

Ivan is in town visiting his aunt Isabel who has dementia. They are on their way to a restaurant for dinner. In order to get there, Ivan decides to hail a taxi. All of a sudden, the car pulls up alongside Isabel and startles her. Isabel, who is normally a very gentle woman, starts scolding the taxi driver.

Ivan feels embarrassed.

A: What comes before the changed behaviour?
Ivan hails a taxi.



B: Changed behaviour
Isabel starts to scold the taxi driver.



C: Consequences
Ivan feels embarrassed.



What would you recommend to Ivan to help him deal with this situation?

Click on any responses you think might be appropriate.

- ☐ Put his hand on Isabel's mouth in order to stop her yelling at the driver.
- ☐ Walk Isabel back to her home and leave because what happened is embarrassing.
- ☐ Stay calm and reassure Isabel everything is alright.
- ☐ Accept the behaviour. If the taxi driver doesn't seem to notice, let it be. Find ways to adapt.
- ☐ Ivan could simply apologise to the taxi driver without making too much fuss.



Check your understanding



What would you recommend?

- ✗ **Put his hand on Isabel's mouth in order to stop her yelling at the driver.**
This response is not good because it may make the situation worse and cause Isabel further agitation.
- ✗ **Walk Isabel back to her home and leave because what happened is embarrassing.**
This response is not good because Isabel may feel bad and isolated.
- ✓ **Stay calm and reassure Isabel everything is alright.**
This is a good response because it shows Ivan cares about and respects Isabel. It may stop her from yelling at the taxi driver and make her feel more relaxed.
- ✓ **Accept the behaviour. If the taxi driver doesn't seem to notice, let it be. Find ways to adapt.**
If the behaviour is not harming anyone, ignoring it can be an appropriate response.
- ✓ **Ivan could simply apologise to the taxi driver without making too much fuss.**
This is a good response because it respects all the people involved and keeps the situation in proportion.

What happens if changes in judgement is more serious?

The last example was a brief and one-time experience for Ivan. What happens if changes in judgement by someone living with dementia is more serious? Here are two examples about finances and driving.

Example: Mishandling finances

Sophie has dementia and lives alone. Her cousin, Julia, has come to visit her. Despite the fact that Sophie has always been organised, Julia arrives to find that there is a large pile of unopened mail on the kitchen table. Julia wonders if Sophie has had some trouble paying her bills. She asks Sophie about her finances. Sophie cannot remember whether she has paid her bills or not, does not know when they are due, and cannot recall how much money she has in her bank account. Julia becomes quite concerned.

What should Julia do?



Person-centred care
Imagine being in the shoes of the person living with dementia and how would you like to be treated.

Check your understanding



What would you recommend to Julia?

Click on all responses you think are appropriate.

- ☐ Stay calm and call Sophie's daughter.
- ☐ Go to the bank and ask for control of Sophie's finances.
- ☐ Leave because she feels uneasy.
- ☐ Ask Sophie if she would like some help in opening her mail.
- ☐ Try to find out whether Sophie has someone who handles her finances, like a family member or a professional.

Check your understanding



- ✓ **Stay calm and call Sophie's daughter.**
This response is good because Julia shares her worries with Sophie's closest relative, her daughter, who might know more and can arrange help if needed.

Check your understanding



- ✗ **Go to the bank and ask for control of Sophie's finances.**
This is not appropriate because it is Sophie's decision to appoint a person she is comfortable with to help manage her finances.
- ✗ **Leave because she feels uneasy.**
This response is not appropriate. If Sophie has problems dealing with her finances, letting the situation continue could make things worse.
- ✓ **Ask Sophie if she would like some help in opening her mail.**
This response is good because Sophie may be able to pay her bills if given the right prompts, such as opening the bills in front of her and cueing her to pay one at a time.
- ✓ **Try to find out whether Sophie has someone who handles her finances, like a family member or a professional.**
This is a good response because Sophie may be at the point in her illness where she is no longer able to handle the finances on her own. If it seems that she is not getting any help with handling her finances, Julia may want to call her daughter to share her worries.

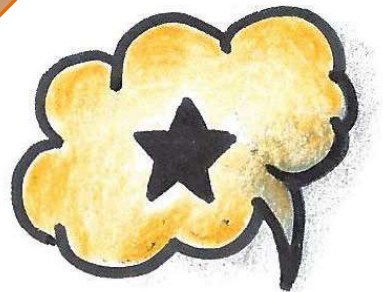
Insisting on driving

Hugo is living with dementia. His neighbour, Pablo, notices that his car is parked very strangely one day, obstructing some of the other cars in the street. Pablo walks out of his home, sees Hugo and attempts to start a conversation. Instead of stopping, Hugo jumps in his car, speeds off and takes an illegal right turn at the end of the street. Hugo returns home very soon and nothing bad seems to have happened.

What should Pablo do?

Person-centred care

Imagine being in the shoes of the person living with dementia and how would you like to be treated.



Check your understanding



What responses would you recommend to Pablo?

Click on all responses you think are appropriate.

- ☐ Immediately seize Hugo's car keys when he returns because this will prevent it from happening again.
- ☐ Stay calm and ask whether Hugo has any other places to go that day, and if so, offer him a ride.
- ☐ Ignore the situation because it is embarrassing.
- ☐ Ask Hugo if he would like some help figuring out transportation.
- ☐ Tell Hugo that he is concerned about his driving and suggest to visit his family doctor (or GP) to discuss it.

Check your understanding

*What responses would you recommend to Pablo?*

- ✗ **Immediately seize Hugo's car keys when he returns because this will prevent it from happening again.**
This is not a good response because Pablo cannot decide for his neighbour if he should not drive anymore and Hugo may become angry.
- ✓ **Stay calm and ask whether Hugo has any other places to go that day, and if so, offer him a ride.**
This is a good response because it prevents Hugo from driving unsafely and provides safe transportation so Hugo can attend to his errands.
- ✗ **Ignore the situation because it is embarrassing.**
This response is not good because Hugo's driving may cause harm to himself and others.
- ✓ **Ask Hugo if he would like some help figuring out transportation.**
This response is appropriate because Hugo may safely ride a bus or walk, preventing any unsafe behaviour.

- ✓ **Tell Hugo that he is concerned about his driving and suggest to visit his family doctor (or GP) to discuss it.**
This response is appropriate because Hugo may safely ride a bus or walk, preventing any unsafe behaviour.

It is better if the decision not to drive comes from the person with dementia. Giving up driving is typically a difficult time in the person's life where they are losing independence and their ability to go where they want to go. Alternatives, such as offering regular rides, teaching the person to use public transport or arranging taxis, will help the person to stay active and involved in their community activities. It is important that the person not becomes isolated or lonely once he or she gives up driving. More effort will be needed to keep this person connected to the world outside their home.

People in Australia with permanent disabilities that limit their ability to drive or use public transport may apply for subsidised taxi fares or use community bus schemes.

Further information can be gained from:

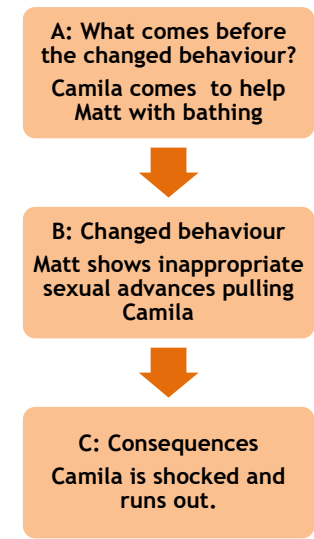
My Aged Care <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au> or
local councils

Tip

Inappropriate sexual advances

Matt is in his late 70s, has dementia and lives with his family. Two days a week, an in-home carer, Camila who is 22 years old, comes to help him take a bath and administer his medications. This arrangement has been working well for several months. One day, while preparing for his bath, Matt makes some sexual remarks and tries to pull Camila close to him. Camila is shocked and surprised. She runs out of the room and tells the family she can no longer work there.

What should Camila and Matt's family do?

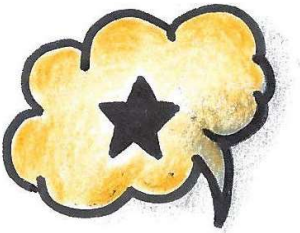


Check your understanding



What responses would you recommend to Matt's family? Click on all responses you think are appropriate.

- ☐ Stay calm and tell Matt that this behaviour is unacceptable. Explain who Camila is.
- ☐ Change the bathing situation. Perhaps Camila can set up a sponge bath and Matt can do more himself.
- ☐ Change the environment. Put a towel or robe over Matt's shoulders while he is being bathed to keep him covered for privacy.
- ☐ Shout at Matt, shaming him for his conduct.
- ☐ Ignore the situation.



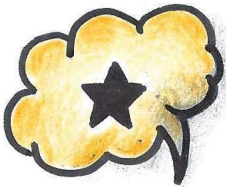
Check your understanding



What responses would you recommend to Matt's family?

- ✓ **Stay calm and tell Matt that this behaviour is unacceptable. Explain who Camila is.**
This option is a good one. Matt's family does not overreact because they remember it is the disease taking effect. They redefine the appropriate boundaries for Camila's safety.
- ✓ **Change the bathing situation. Perhaps Camila can set up a sponge bath and Matt can do more himself.**
This is a good option. Let Matt do more himself will distract him. In this way, both Camila and Matt's dignity are maintained.
- ✓ **Change the environment. Put a towel or robe over Matt's shoulders while he is being bathed to keep him covered for privacy.**
This is a good response. Perhaps because Matt is naked, he misunderstands the situation.

- ✗ **Shout at Matt, shaming him for his conduct.**
This is an inappropriate response, because Matt may not recognise that these advances may be a part of his dementia. Therefore, try not to overreact.
- ✗ **Ignore the situation.**
This response is not good, because Matt may continue to make inappropriate sexual advances and cause distress to Camila or others.



If the inappropriate advances continue, talk with the person's doctor, they may be able to work out what's causing the behaviour and how to treat it. The family might want to consider employing a male in-home carer for bathing which could prevent this behaviour.

Tip

Activity

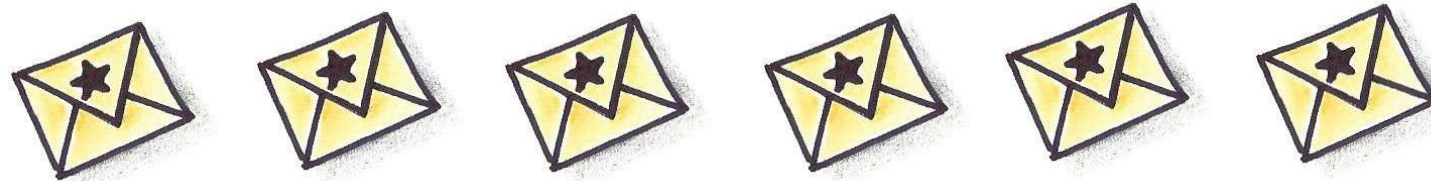


Let's look at your own situation

It is important to relate what you have learnt to your own situation.
After going through these examples, think again about your own situation. These boxes are for you, like a diary:

Does the person with dementia sometimes show changes in judgement?

Take a moment to summarise what you have learnt in this learning unit to deal with changes in judgement and in what ways you could respond.



Let's review what you have learned

- Changes in can increase as dementia progresses.
- Changes in judgement can be very upsetting for the person with dementia and the carer.
- It is important to reduce or prevent changes in judgement, whenever possible.
- Realise there may be good days and bad days.
- Remind yourself that this is a part of the disease.
- Take a deep breath and think about the best ways to respond that will be the least distressing for you and the person you care for.
- Plan for increasing levels of changes in judgement in the future.

RELATED LEARNING UNITS

- Module 3 Unit 3 Thinking differently
- Module 4 Unit 2 Eating, drinking and preventing health problems

Additional Resources

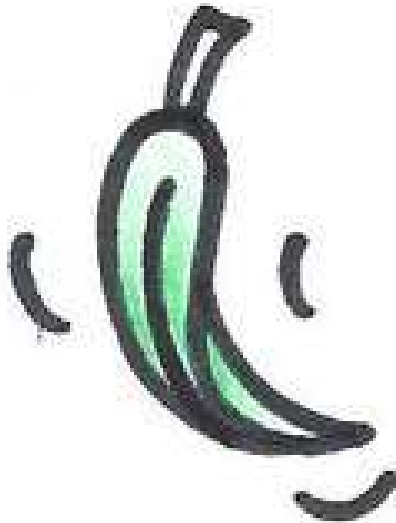
- **Dementia Australia**, <https://www.dementia.org.au/>
The National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500 is open nationally from 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday excluding public holidays. A message service is available if you call outside operating hours.
- **Dementia Support Australia** <https://www.dementia.com.au/>
The Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS) offers people with dementia and their carers support in managing behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia, such as walking and getting lost and aggression. Contact them on 1800 699 799 (24 hours a day).

You finished this learning unit, well done!

Would you like to try the following relaxation exercise?

Neck movements

With this exercise you will feel less tension in your neck. It will also increase the blood flow to your brain.



This is how you do it:

- Make sure to move slowly and with attention.
- Bend your neck forward and backward.
- Inhale while you lift your head up and back. Exhale while you drop your chin to your chest.
- Rotate your chin from side to side.
- Inhale when your chin is in the centre. Exhale when you look to the side.
- Drop your ear towards your shoulder.
- Inhale when you are in the centre. Exhale when you drop your ear to your shoulder.
- Repeat 5 times.



You finished this unit, well done!