



## What is dementia?

- There are many types of dementia and the most common is Alzheimer's Disease. Dementia is not just "memory problems".
- People with dementia have changes to the brain that make it hard for them to think, to do things that used to be simple, and to communicate. Each person may have a different set of symptoms.

## Behavioural symptoms of dementia

- As dementia progresses, many people with dementia lose the ability to use the problem solving and emotion regulating parts of the brain. For many people, the limbic system is affected last. This is the part of the brain that is focused on survival, needs and safety. The survival instinct is their strongest part of their brain.
- With the "thinking" parts of the brain damaged, people with dementia can sometimes become afraid and defensive about things that we do not think are scary.



### All behaviour has meaning

Behavioural symptoms like wandering, calling out and resistance to care are a result of feeling threatened in some way. They are not being difficult on purpose. We need to help them to feel safe and respected.

## Essential Ideas

- Sometimes we can figure out what is scaring them and change it. Sometimes we can't – but there is something. They may remember something tomorrow that they couldn't remember today. That's not on purpose. That's the brain changes and brain chemicals changing from day to day.
- Never argue with someone with dementia. No one wins.
- Live in the moment with the person – even if they seem to be living in another time and place. Correcting them will not help.
- Your tone of voice and body language are your most important tools. – Sound and look like you respect them, and they are important.
- Their ability to express themselves may be gone before they lose the ability to understand what's being said to them.
- Their ability to "read" your body language and tone of voice remains even when they don't understand your words.
- If they ask the same question 20 times, answer 20 times as though it were the first.
- They cannot easily change their response, so we must change our approach

## Approach Tips

- Approach them from the front, and introduce yourself
- Greet them by name and make eye contact
- Connect with them before doing things to them or making demands on them
- Give time to respond and give directions one at a time
- If they become upset, give space and apologize – even if you didn't do anything wrong. It can be a reset button.
- Approach with a smile unless they are upset. In that case approach them and show that you are concerned and want to help.