



Dementia Behavior Cheat Sheet

When the Behavior IS the Message

*Behaviors are not personal.
They are communication from a brain under stress.*

Keep this nearby for the moments when your own brain goes blank.

First: The Golden Rule

You can't argue with brain damage.
You **can** reduce fear.

Before responding, ask yourself:

- Is this unsafe?
- Or is it just upsetting / incorrect / frustrating?

If it's not unsafe, **calm matters more than correction.**

Common Dementia Behaviors — and What Helps

ANGER, AGITATION, OR YELLING

What it may mean:

- Fear
- Overstimulation
- Feeling rushed or confused
- Loss of control
- Physical discomfort (pain, hunger, fatigue)

What helps:

- Lower your voice
- Slow everything down
- Give space if needed
- Validate the feeling

Try saying:

- "I can see this is upsetting."
- "I'm here. Let's pause."
- "You're safe."

Avoid:

- Arguing
- Matching their volume
- Explaining why they're wrong

REPETITION (QUESTIONS, STORIES, WORRIES)

What it may mean:

- Anxiety
- Seeking reassurance
- Memory not sticking

What helps:

- Calm repetition of reassurance
- Visual reminders
- Gentle redirection

Try saying:

- "Yes, that's taken care of."
- "I'm here with you."
- "Let's check the calendar together."

Avoid:

- “You already asked that”
- Showing frustration

WANDERING OR RESTLESSNESS**What it may mean:**

- Anxiety
- Searching for familiarity
- Need for movement
- Feeling “out of place”

What helps:

- Reassurance
- Supervised walks or movement
- Redirection to a familiar activity
- Calm environment

Try saying:

- “Let’s walk together.”
- “You’re safe here.”
- “Sit with me for a moment.”

Avoid:

- Blocking exits aggressively
- Saying “You can’t go”

CONFUSION OR DELUSIONS**(Beliefs that aren’t based in reality)****What it may mean:**

- Misinterpretation of surroundings
- Brain filling in gaps
- Fear or paranoia

What helps:

- Validate the emotion, not the belief
- Redirect attention
- Reassure safety

Try saying:

- “That sounds scary.”

- “I’m here with you.”
- “Let’s take care of this together.”

Avoid:

- Proving them wrong
- Long explanations
- Telling them they’re “imagining things”

CRYING OR EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS**What it may mean:**

- Overwhelm
- Grief
- Frustration
- Fatigue

What helps:

- Quiet presence
- Gentle touch (if welcome)
- Reassurance

Try saying:

- “I know this is hard.”
- “You’re not alone.”
- “I’m right here.”

Avoid:

- Telling them to calm down
- Minimizing their feelings
- When Nothing Is Working

Pause and check:

- Hunger
- Thirst
- Pain
- Fatigue
- Overstimulation (noise, lights, people)
- Need to use the bathroom

Behavior often improves when physical needs are met.

A Simple Reset You Can Always Try

- Lower your voice
- Slow your movements
- Reduce words
- Offer reassurance
- Change the environment

Sometimes the best response is **less**.

Gentle Reminder for Caregivers

You will:

- Say the wrong thing sometimes
- Lose patience
- Feel guilty afterward

That does not erase your care or effort.

This is not about perfection.
It's about reducing fear — for both of you.

Bottom Line

Behavior is communication.

Fear is often underneath.

Calm is powerful.

When the brain is struggling, kindness speaks louder than logic.