

# Behavioural Resource Sheet: Agitation and Aggression

**Agitation** is restless behaviour that may be shown in many ways and may be seen before aggression. **Aggression** can include physical, mental, or emotional harm to others. It can include both **physical** (e.g., hitting, pinching, biting, slapping) and **verbal** (e.g., insulting, swearing, and yelling) behaviour. For people with dementia, behaviours occur as a result of an unmet need (e.g., physical, environmental, spiritual, etc.) and is their best attempt to **respond** to their current situation.

## Possible triggers of this behaviour:

Pain	Illness	Physical Health Problems
Discomfort	Low levels of Stimulation	Low amounts of socialization
Poor hearing	Poor vision	Feeling under-valued
Interrupted Routine	Lack of choices	Poor connections

## Things to know...

- Aggression may be due to fear and self-protection.
- Pain, infection, and other physical causes must be considered in addressing aggression.
- Though medications can help with aggression, underlying causes are not always addressed. It's important to address any controllable factors that may be contributing to agitation and/or aggression.

## In the moment...

- Get help if you need it. Ensure others are safe. Take a deep breath and approach only if necessary.
- Approaching one-on-one (when safe to do so) can be helpful, as large groups can be intimidating. Provide space for the person.
- Listen to what they're saying. This helps identify a cause for the behaviour and identifies you as a trusted person. Speak calmly, acknowledging the person's upset state if possible.
- Follow an established plan for dealing with aggressive behaviour in your setting (including any previous training) and document each time the behaviour happens.

## To prepare for next time...

- Track the behaviour using a tool (e.g., the Direct Observation System) to determine potential triggers, times of day when aggression is worse, and other patterns of behaviour.
- Consider the person's perceptions. Brainstorm ideas about potential causes. Invite perspectives from the person, their loved ones, and staff. Consider the person to be at the centre of this planning.

## Other helpful tips...

- If you're able to give space, come back later and try again.
- Don't punish the person for aggressive behaviour. Though it can be very distressing for caregivers and co-residents, try not to take aggression personally. The behaviour is a result of a number of factors which are usually outside the person's control. It is not their fault. It is not your fault.