

People who have problems with memory, thinking and reasoning sometimes seem to react in a way that seems odd or irrational. For example:

- They may have trouble making what seem like very simple decisions.
- They may ask the same question over and over.
- They may shout at other people or be angry for what seems like no good reason.

It is important to remember that reactions or behaviour that **seem** irrational are usually simply an attempt to make sense of muddled ideas and memories that form in the mind.

The natural reaction when things like this happen is to point out mistakes or become frustrated or angry yourself. This usually just makes things worse for everyone. The person may be unaware that there is anything wrong with them. Or they may forget from time to time that there is something wrong. Or they may be aware that *something* is wrong but are not quite sure what.

Try to imagine if someone suddenly started telling **you** what to do and how to do it or where to go and when. You think you're fine but everyone else keeps interfering. Most of us would be puzzled, perhaps resentful or even angry.

### **So how can I help?**

There is no one right or wrong way of responding. However, with trial and error it usually is possible to learn which approach tends to work best for an individual in a particular situation. The following **ABC guidelines** may help.

Remember though that being a carer can be stressful. Sometimes you will be simply too tired to react in the way you know works best. We are all human and can only do the best we can!

## **A**void confrontation

Confronting the person with their mistakes is unlikely to help. It creates a negative atmosphere for no benefit. A neutral approach can help keep the peace. This involves giving a non-committal response to mistakes, for example "*Oh really*" or "*I don't know*" rather than using lengthy arguments, discussion or correction. It is important though not actively to mislead the person by giving wrong information.

## **B**e practical

It sometimes is possible to anticipate situations that cause problems and to avoid them. When a problem does arise, there may be something practical you can do to ease the situation (*see example on next page*).

## **C**larify the feelings and comfort

If the person is anxious or upset, telling him how you think he is feeling may help. You are attempting to clarify his feelings for him. This can help him feel more at ease. The approach should be used sensitively. Clarifying a person's feelings sometimes can be unhelpful or inappropriate. If the person seems more at ease when you have suggested how they might be feeling, the approach probably has been appropriate.

Overleaf is an example of how the ABC approach might be used.

## Problem:

*He asks the same question over and over.*

### Why is this happening?

The same idea keeps forming in his head and he makes it into a question. He forgets the answer he has been given. He forgets that he has already asked the question.

## Avoid confrontation

Don't say: *"You've just asked me that"*.  
If practical suggestions such as those below are not working, try a non-committal reply e.g: *"I'm not sure"*.

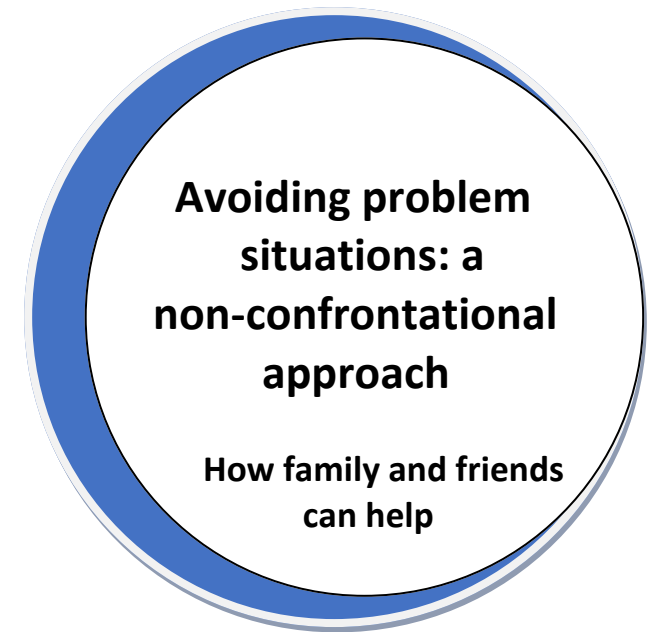
## Be practical

- Try a short simple answer.
- Try writing the answer down for the person to refer to.
- Try avoiding situations that cause repetition e.g. *don't mention appointments until last minute.*
- Try distraction e.g. *guide towards an activity such as making a cup of tea.*

## Clarify the feelings and comfort.

(If anxious or upset). *"You seem worried that you can't remember the date"* or *"I can never remember the date either"*.

It may be that the fear of not remembering the date is the real issue rather than the date itself.



Education Centre, University Hospital Llandough  
Penarth, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan,  
CF64 2XX, Tel No. 029 20716961  
Fax No. 029 20704244

[Memory.team@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:Memory.team@wales.nhs.uk)

