

Dealing with Atypical Behavior

Mental and Emotional Health

In caring for our clients (patients), we do not just care for their physical needs. We also must take into consideration any mental or emotional conditions that may affect their behaviors. That is why it is important to know what diagnosis a patient has that may have associated behaviors that must be added to their care needs. It is equally important in knowing how to deal with those behaviors. Sometimes the reason behind the behavior may not be easy to identify. Unlike being able to see something physical (for instance, if someone has a leg amputation, you can see and understand they will have difficulty with ambulation), when someone has a behavior, it can be more difficult to identify the reason behind the behavior. It is important to remember that the behavior may be a symptom of what is going on with the patient just like having a cough may be the symptom of the flu. Always remember to separate the person from the behavior.

The *key* to dealing with difficult and/or combative patients is changing the way *you react* to the situation. Remember you may not have control over how they act but you do have control over how *you react*.

Difficult People



Personality does not normally change a lot over time. A grumpy old man/woman was probably unhappy when they were younger as well. However, there are things that can make a normally “easy going” person behave as a difficult person. Clients may be suffering from **pain** or **illness**, recovering from **stress** or **tragedy**, dealing with a **disability**, **feeling lonely**, **depressed**, **loss of control** or even taking a **medication** that may make them act differently than normal.

Difficult clients may be: Demanding, irritable, unreasonable, stubborn, critical, depressed, sarcastic, uncooperative, angry, complaining, ungrateful, pushy, mean, or argumentative.

In dealing with difficult people, remember to separate the behavior from the person. Are they feeling alone or not able to control what is going on with them? Sometimes in home care, clients that could normally do their own care, are no longer able to care for themselves and they may feel anger about losing control over their lives.

Ways to help deal with difficult clients include:

1. **Listen** to what they are saying. Maybe they just need someone safe to vent to.
2. Determine if you are doing something that **triggers** their behavior such as “being late to work or talking on the phone”. If so, you have control over what you do.
3. **Stay calm** and respectful.
4. **Avoid arguing.**
5. It is best **not to touch the person** as it may aggravate the situation.
6. Do not take their behavior personal no matter how personal the attack it.
7. **SEPARATE THE PERSON FROM THE BEHAVIOR.**

Combative People



A combative client may be **triggered** by anger because they can no longer do things they could before. They may be frustrated at **lack of control** or may be **confused** and not understand that you are trying to help them. Some traumatic brain injury patient become combative because they no longer have control over their behavior. Studies show that **30% of traumatic brain injury patients report struggles with anger and aggressive behavior.** Patient with **dementia can also get combative** when they are **overstimulated, frustrated, feel afraid, lack the ability to express themselves, have their personal space invaded.** Combative behavior includes *pinching, scratching, kicking, hitting, biting, pulling hair, spitting on you, or throwing things*. No employee is expected to tolerate any type of combative behavior. If a client becomes combative, remove yourself from the client and call the office or on call nurse immediately.

Ways to help manage combative behaviors:

1. Remain **calm, speak slowly,** and do not raise your voice.
2. **Listen** to what they are saying. Do not tease or ignore them.
3. **Do not argue** with them.
4. Agitated client often responds to soft, soothing music. (no rock in roll or loud music)
5. If the **TV** is on, turn it off – it may be **too stimulating.**
6. Do not get into their “**personal space**”, stay a distance away until they have calmed down.
Do not crowd them.
7. **Avoid touching** angry clients.
8. **Look for triggers,** do they become aggressive when:
 - a. They are hungry.
 - b. At a particular time of day.
 - c. When they are too hot or too cold.
 - d. After taking medications.

- e. When they are with a group of people.
 - f. When they are left alone.
9. Leave your “bling” at home – especially necklaces and earrings. Clients have grabbed necklaces and pulled earring out of earlobes.
 10. Clients have rights. If they refused care, like a bath, leave them alone and wait a while. Then ask later if they would like to be bathed.
 11. **SEPARATE THE PERSON FROM THE BEHAVIOR.**

Behaviors with clients who have central nervous system disorders:

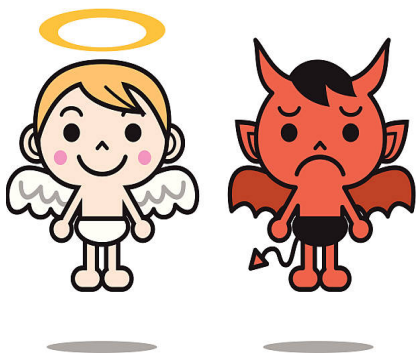


Clients (children) with central nervous system disorders such as cerebral palsy, frequently have behavioral problems. These behaviors include attention problems, hyperactive behaviors, emotional problems, increased dependence, obstinacy, outburst, screaming, headstrong, aggressive, decreased attention span. Studies have shown that children with cerebral palsy are five times more likely to have behavior problems. Roughly, 25% of

people with cerebral palsy have behavioral issues. Temper tantrums are one of the most common behaviors with children that have cerebral palsy. Knowing how to manage these behaviors will help you, the client and loved ones of the client feel more comfortable.

Ways to help manage temper tantrums:

1. Remain calm, do not yell, speech slowly.
2. Do not give in. If the child throws a tantrum and you give in, you will only reinforce the behavior.
3. Time outs – generally a time out should be about one minute for each year of age. This will give the child time to cool off and reflect on their own before returning to their activity.
4. Be positive.



Remember, you cannot control other people actions BUT you can control the way YOU react. Depending on your response, you can make the situation better or worse!