

## Redirecting Repetitive Behavior Empowerment Tool

Repetition, both verbal and physical, is a common symptom of dementia and may increase as decline progresses. While generally harmless, it is one of the behaviors that is most distressing to caregivers. Redirection or distraction is a technique that shifts the focus away from the repetition toward a different situation or activity and brings a person with dementia back to a place of well-being.

Repetitive behavior can be a response to feelings such as fear, anxiety, hunger, thirst, or boredom. They may indicate toileting needs or feeling too hot or too cold when the person can no longer find the words to express these needs.

### TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO REPETITIVE BEHAVIOR

- Realize that their thoughts and feelings are real and are influencing the behavior.
- Do not shut down the behavior right away (unless there is imminent danger).
- Offer reassurance vs correction. It is not helpful to attempt reorientation by saying, “you don’t need to go home, you are home.”
- Remain calm, friendly, and helpful.

## EMPLOY REDIRECTION TECHNIQUES

You will be more effective in ending the unwanted behavior by understanding and then addressing the thoughts and feelings behind the behavior. Shutting down the behavior right away will likely make the person even angrier. Over time, you will learn which distractions are most effective.

- Look at the environment. Is it too hot or too cold? Is the space calm and comforting or noisy? Sometimes it's the environment that needs redirection.
- Ask questions. If they keep asking to go home, ask "Where is home?" to see which home from their lifetime they are talking about. Then keep asking questions about that home. You can repeat questions if needed. Dip into long-term memory vs the present.
- If they are constantly walking, walk along with your care partner. Forcing him/her to "just sit down" will cause more agitation. Guide to a safe place such as an enclosed backyard. Getting someone outside in a safe manner is a good distraction.
- Turn on favorite music and use reminiscence to distract thoughts. Ask, "who sings this song," and then talk about when and where.
- Take a car ride if your care partner thinks it is time to go somewhere. Many times, circling the block will do it.
- If your care partner is worried about the children, find a photo album and reminisce.
- Find a purposeful activity that your care partner can feel helpful and successful.
- Always acknowledge feelings, "I'm so sorry that you are worried about getting the bills paid on time."
- Use touch. A gentle back, hand, arm, or foot rub is very effective in breaking the repetition cycle.
- Create a busy basket and have it on hand to distract your care partner into a new task.
- Offer food or drink.