**Responding to aggressive behaviour**

It can be difficult to know how to react when a person is behaving aggressively. Read our tips for responding to aggression.

Even when it is difficult to, try to take a moment to think about their needs and why they might be behaving aggressively. They are not likely to be doing it on purpose and trying to reason with them is not likely to lead them to change their behaviour.

The following tips may help you – they are things you can do, and avoid doing, while the person is behaving aggressively and afterwards.

**At the time**

* Before you react, take a deep breath, step back to give the person space and take some time. It may help to leave the room until you’re both feeling calmer.
* Although it can be difficult, try to stay calm. An angry response may make the situation worse.
* Make sure you are safe. You should never tolerate violence against you.
* If the person’s behaviour is physically violent, try not to show any fear, alarm or anxiety, as this may increase the person’s agitation. This may be hard if you feel threatened. If you do feel threatened, walk away from the situation and call for help.
* Give them plenty of space and time. Unless it’s absolutely necessary, avoid moving too close or trying to restrain someone, as this can make things worse.
* Try not to shout or initiate physical contact – the person may see this as threatening behaviour.
* Reassure the person and acknowledge their feelings. For example, if the person is angry because they are being stopped from collecting their children, acknowledge that they want to look after their children and reassure them that they are safe.
* Try not to take the behaviour personally – the person is probably trying to communicate a need or that something is wrong, rather than attacking you personally. Listen to what they are saying. Try to keep your body language open (for example by not crossing your arms) and calm. It can also help if your body language is similar to the person’s – for example if they are sitting down with their arms by their side, you may want to mirror this. This shows that you are not against them and that you want to help.
* Keep eye contact and try to explain calmly why you are there. Encourage the person to communicate with you.
* Try to distract the person’s attention if they continue to be angry.
* If you are trying to support the person with an activity or task, does it need to be done at that moment? If you are able to give them space, come back later and try again – it may help you both to feel calmer.

**When the behaviour has passed**

* Try not to blame or punish the person for the behaviour. They are unlikely to have done it on purpose and they may not understand why you are treating them differently. Try to carry on as normal and be as reassuring as possible.
* Focus on the person, not the behaviour. They may still be upset and distressed after the behaviour has passed.
* Take some time and talk through your feelings with others – for example, the GP, friends and family, counsellor or dementia support worker. If you don’t talk about your feelings, it may be harder to care for the person and also mean that you find yourself focusing on the behaviour instead of the person.