

# Accusations in Dementia: When a Loved One Thinks You're Stealing or Lying (With Scripts)

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Accusations are one of the most emotionally painful experiences for caregivers. A loved one with dementia may believe you are stealing, lying, or acting against them. These beliefs are not intentional—they are caused by changes in the brain, especially memory loss and impaired reasoning. Understanding how to respond can reduce conflict and protect relationships.

## Common Accusations

- “You took my money”
- “You’re lying to me”
- “Someone is stealing from me”
- “You moved my things on purpose”
- “I don’t trust you”

## Why This Happens

- Misplacing items and being unable to remember where they put them
- Memory gaps that the brain tries to “fill in”
- Difficulty recognizing familiar people
- Loss of control leading to suspicion
- Anxiety and fear
- Frontal lobe changes affecting judgment

## Core Principles for Responding

- Do NOT argue or try to prove them wrong
- Do NOT take it personally
- Acknowledge the emotion behind the accusation
- Offer reassurance and partnership
- Redirect rather than confront

## What to Say (Real-World Scripts)

- “That sounds really upsetting. Let’s figure it out together.”
- “I can see why that would worry you. I’m here to help.”
- “Let’s look for it together—I want to help you find it.”
- “You’re safe. I’m on your side.”

## If They Accuse YOU Directly

- Avoid defensiveness
- Stay calm

Example:

“I’m really sorry this feels that way. I would never take anything from you. Let’s figure out what happened together.”

## What NOT to Say

- “That’s ridiculous”
- “You’re wrong”
- “You already asked that”
- “Why would I do that?”

These responses often escalate conflict.

## When Emotions Escalate

- Lower your voice
- Give space if needed
- Avoid physical closeness if agitation increases

Example:

“I can see this is really upsetting. Let’s take a moment and come back to this.”

## Practical Prevention Strategies

- Keep important items in consistent places
- Use labeled storage
- Create duplicates of commonly lost items
- Maintain routines
- Reduce clutter
- Use reassurance frequently

## Final Notes

- Accusations in dementia are common and driven by brain changes.
- Responding with empathy and calm can reduce distress.
- Protecting the relationship is more important than correcting the belief.

## Protecting the Relationship

- Remember this is the disease, not the person
- Focus on emotional connection, not being “right”
- Repair moments after conflict with calm reassurance
- Give yourself permission to feel hurt—and seek support

## When to Seek Medical Help

- Sudden onset of paranoia or accusations
- Aggression or safety concerns
- Rapid worsening of symptoms
- Possible delirium or medication-related causes