

# Responding to Delusions & Hallucinations in Dementia: A Guide for Patients & Families

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People living with dementia may sometimes experience delusions or hallucinations. Delusions are false beliefs that feel very real to the person, such as believing someone is stealing from them. Hallucinations occur when someone sees, hears, or senses things that are not actually present. These experiences can be frightening or confusing for the person with dementia and stressful for caregivers. Understanding how to respond calmly and supportively can help reduce distress.

## Common Examples

- Believing someone has stolen money or belongings
- Unwarranted belief of partner infidelity
- Thinking strangers are in the house
- Seeing people or animals that are not present
- Hearing voices or sounds others cannot hear
- Misidentifying family members or caregivers

## Why These Symptoms Occur

- Changes in brain function caused by dementia
- Memory loss leading to misinterpretation of events
- Poor lighting or visual changes
- Fatigue or stress
- Certain medications or medical illnesses
- Sleep disturbances

## Helpful Ways to Respond

### Stay Calm

- Speak in a gentle and reassuring tone
- Avoid showing frustration or fear
- Remember the experience feels real to the person

### Avoid Arguing About Reality

- Arguing often increases distress
- Instead, acknowledge the person's feelings
- Offer reassurance and comfort

## Provide Reassurance

- Let the person know they are safe
- Offer calm explanations without confrontation

## Redirect Attention

- Suggest another activity
- Change the environment or move to another room
- Use music, conversation, or a familiar activity

## Check the Environment

- Improve lighting to reduce shadows
- Remove objects that may cause visual confusion
- Ensure glasses or hearing aids are used if needed

## When to Contact a Healthcare Provider

- If hallucinations or delusions cause significant fear or distress
- If behaviors become unsafe or aggressive
- If symptoms appear suddenly or worsen quickly
- If medications may be contributing to symptoms

## Tips for Caregivers

- Focus on comfort and reassurance
- Avoid lengthy explanations
- Maintain calm routines and environments
- Seek support if caregiving becomes overwhelming

## National Organizations & Resources

✓ Alzheimer's Association

☎ 800-272-3900 | 🌐 [alz.org](http://alz.org)

✓ National Institute on Aging

🌐 [nia.nih.gov](http://nia.nih.gov)

✓ Family Caregiver Alliance

🌐 [caregiver.org](http://caregiver.org)

✓ Eldercare Locator

☎ 1-800-677-1116 | 🌐 [eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov)

## Final Notes

- Delusions and hallucinations are relatively common in some types of dementia.
- Calm reassurance and environmental adjustments can often reduce distress.
- Caregivers should seek professional guidance when symptoms become severe or difficult to manage.