

Quick Talk- Preventing Adverse Behaviors

Triggers for Adverse Behaviors

You are walking down the hall to answer a call light when you notice Mr. Jones sitting in his wheelchair and talking to himself in an agitated manner. You only have a moment for this normally calm and friendly resident but want to briefly reassure him before you answer the call light. You gently touch his shoulder, lean forward and in your best soothing voice tell him you will be with him in a few minutes. He flinches and his hand lashes out striking you in the face knocking your glasses off. While this scenario describes an adverse behavior in a healthcare setting consider how a similar behavior can occur in your work environment.

Let us consider a few possible triggers for adverse behaviors you may have missed:

- Environmental- noise, light levels, and smells
- Mealtimes- and other high stimulation activity occurring
- Medications-changes in medication levels and/or starting new medications
- Change in medical status- i.e. UTI
- Lack of personal space-misperceived threats, body posture (hands on hips), standing between the person and door, and standing directly in front of the person
- Clothing-poor fitting and rough materials

What behaviors can you use to lessen the onset of adverse behaviors:

- Respect personal space-keep at least an arm's length away
- Approach from an angle- this allows the person to see you, but they cannot easily reach you
- Use calming nonverbal communication- i.e. smiling and slow movements
- Slow yourself down- this allows the person time to properly react to your request
- Use words that acknowledge their feelings and do not challenge them or insist "they calm down"

Discussion:

- Do you know what triggers your person's behaviors?
- How do you attempt to de-escalate the person(s) you care for?
- What is an example(s) of a specific incident you encountered and how did you react? Were you successful in changing the person's behavior? Would you have done something different?