



Dealing with Sexual Disinhibition

DO'S AND DON'TS

We must remember that dementia is a disease and that the brain is physically changing. These changes cause a person to act differently. The most effective way to deal with sexual disinhibition while maintaining client-centered care is to make observations about the behavior, identify possible triggers, and develop a strategy in response. Below are some simple do's and don'ts when dealing with sexual disinhibition in a client with dementia.

Don't:

- **Label people** by saying “wanderer” or “sexually aggressive.”
- **Tell the person that it is inappropriate.**
- **Try to reason with them.**
- **Scold them.** Disinhibition in dementia is due to physiological changes in the brain—not because the person is a “pervert” or that the disease has made them stop thinking about how others feel.
- Generally, it is not productive to tell the person you are married.

Do:

- **Acknowledge the person's desire to engage in sexual behavior.** As we age, our desire for sexual attention does not go away.
- **Consider that the behavior stems from an underlying need for affection.** Look for other ways to fulfill this basic human need for affection and appropriate touch.
- **Wear a name badge and professional uniform.** This may provide a visual sign that you are not here in any sexual capacity.
- **Observe if any particular care tasks are triggering sexually inappropriate behavior.**
- **Place an object of interest in the client's hands** during care and/or during times when you know the behavior might occur.
- **Engage in a conversation about love or affection.** Perhaps offer an alternative form of affectionate touch like a back massage.
- **Divert attention to a known activity of interest.** For example, play your client's favorite song.
- **Be assertive in delivering direction to divert attention.** Stay confident and strong.
- **Always remember that you have the Seniors At Home team to support you—just ask!**

If you follow these do's and don'ts but continue to feel uncomfortable with a particular client, discuss the situation with your supervisor.

To schedule a dementia care consultation email dementiacare@jfcs.org or call 415-449-3712

Seniors At Home is a division of Jewish Family and Children's Services • San Francisco • Peninsula • Marin • Sonoma County