Welcome to Intensi-tea
Stress and distress in dementia

youngdementianetwork.org/our-webinars
Introductions

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Session outline

- What is stress and / or distress?
- Symptoms
- Causes
- Fight or flight
- Time intensity model
- Discussion with two family carers
- Reducing the stress
What is stress and distress?
Challenging behaviour*

Or

Reactions to stress in the person’s world and the distress this causes?

* A term still in use. You may also hear ‘behaviours that challenge.’
Distressed behaviour is the tip of the iceberg

What you see - the signs and symptoms - are just the tip of the iceberg

To understand and manage it, you need to look beneath the surface
Distressed behaviour is the tip of the iceberg

What you see - the signs and symptoms of stress or distress

- Repetitive / obsessive behaviour or speech
- Aggressive
- Disruptive
- Verbally abusive
- Self-injurious
- Anti-social or illegal behaviour
- Withdrawn
What this may look like

- Inconsolable crying
- Arguing
- Swearing
- Non-compliance
- Spitting, hitting or shouting
- A need to walk
- Repetitive questioning or behaviour
- Withdrawing
- Delusional beliefs
What’s beneath the surface?

To understand and manage, you need to look beneath the surface

*Intrinsic v extrinsic*
Possible causes of stress and distress

**Beliefs**
I’m still in my 20s and I need to go to work

**Medication related issues**
Drug interactions and side effects

**Mental health status**
Anxiety / mood depression / psychosis

**Perceptual deficits**
Visual / auditory / tactile

**Premorbid personality traits**

**Physical difficulties**

**Cognitive / neurological status**
Changes in reasoning, planning, memory, communication

**Metabolic changes**
Impacting on appetite, energy, irritability

**Environmental setting**
Is the environment supportive?
How does the carer interact?
Feelings of stress can trigger primitive reactions and responses both in excitement or in fear.

The fight or flight response
A drive to survive

Note: can happen in excitement as well as in fear
Fight or flight?

Amygdala is the emotional response centre that is scanning for threats.
Time intensity model
Time intensity model
Why is it more difficult for a person with dementia to ‘calm down’?

• The person has a heightened state of physiological arousal
• The feelings have overtaken and become big and lose their perspective
• This can affect the sense of control and it’s scary to have a loss of control
• Thinking straight is impossible. They are in ‘the heat of the moment’ and the cortical weakening is leading to ‘a drive to survive’ or distressed behaviour
Discussion
Reducing the stress (for both of you)

Golden rules

- Avoid confrontation
- Don’t argue about facts
- Clarify and comfort
Moving forward – settling the fight / flight and reducing stress

- Validate emotions
- Use calming voice
- Body language / personal space
- Sensitivity
- Reassurance – meet the emotional need
- Look after yourself
- Think about the environment eg noise
- Can the trigger be removed?
Looking after yourself

- Self-care
- Sense of self
- Relationships
- Development
- Belonging
Thank you for joining us.