

ASSESSING EMOTIONAL STATUS

Suggestions of Questions to Ask about a Person with Cognitive Impairment

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TO KEEP IN MIND

1. A person with cognitive impairment may not show their emotions in a way that is easy to interpret. Sometimes they are less verbal or nonverbal, their body is not very demonstrative, or they may not know or be able to easily express their emotions.
2. Because a person with cognitive impairment may have difficulty experiencing emotion and to think or process information at the same time, it is important to address and respond to a person's emotions first, before trying to make a request or give instructions. When a person is calm and relaxed, they are more likely to see and hear more accurately and to understand and respond more easily to what you are saying.
3. It is important to constantly observe and listen to a person so you can spot the first signs of distress, confusion, irritation, or anxiety. Then you can immediately modify the way you are interacting, the environment, or the task to help the person feel more relaxed and comfortable.
4. This handout gives suggestions on where to look and what to look for or notice, to help discern what a person with cognitive impairment is feeling. Many times the emotional reactions are subtle and minimal. So careful observation is necessary. Avoid looking away when you are talking to someone, so you don't miss an important small sign of emotional distress that has potential for becoming a much greater expression of frustration or anger, such as a hit or kick.

SUGGESTIONS OF QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. How does this person sound?

- A. What is this person saying?
 - a. Words
 - b. Vocalizations
- B. How is this person saying it?
 - a. Pace/Speed of sound
 - Rushed, moderately paced, slow
 - Pauses or hesitations
 - Delays in response to stimuli
 - b. Volume
 - c. Pitch
 - d. Repetition
- C. Are there changes in content and style of speech or sound delivery?
 - a. Spontaneous
 - b. In response to stimuli

2. How does this person look?

- A. Body movement (if parts of the body are already rigid, movements may be subtle)
 - a. Pulling away

- b. Tensing
 - c. Jerking
 - d. Relaxing
 - e. Moving with purpose or focus
- B. Face
- a. Eye brows (knit, raised, relaxed)
 - b. Eyes (close, flutter, shift, dart, focus, stare vacantly)
 - c. Mouth (tightens, slackens, lifts)
 - d. Jaw or teeth (clenches, opens, relaxes)
- C. Shoulders (tense, jerk, relax, slump)
- D. Arms (tense, jerk, relax, move with purpose)
- a. Hands (tense, jerk, relax, move with purpose)
 - b. Fingers (tense, fist, jerk, relax, move with purpose)
- E. Torso (tense, pulling away, jerk, relax, move with purpose)
- F. Legs (tense, jerk, relax, move with purpose)
- a. Feet (tense, jerk, relax, move with purpose)
 - b. Toes (tense, curl, jerk, relax, move with purpose)

3. How might this person's past help clarify the feelings now?

- A. How has this person usually felt in the past (recent and remote)?
 - a. In general
 - b. About a particular stimulus
 - c. Is there a significant difference between the past and current feelings?
- B. Has there been pain that might relate to the current feelings?
 - a. Emotional
 - b. Physical
- C. How has this person coped with feelings and events in the past?
 - a. Are they using the same coping strategies now?

4. How does this person seem to be feeling now?

- A. Happy
- B. Content
- C. Giddy
- D. Sad
- E. Grieving
- F. Anxious
- G. Fearful
- H. Confused
- I. Angry
- J. Other