

RESPONSE TO ACUTE DISTRESS

Suggestions of Assessment Questions when Assisting Someone with Cognitive Impairment Shelly Weaverdyck

These are key questions to ask yourself when responding immediately to a situation where a person with cognitive impairment is in acute distress, as evidenced by their emotional expression or behaviors.

1. **Assessing the situation:**

Gathering information to analyze all factors involved in the situation:

What are the immediate factors I need to address, for example:

- Are this person and all other people (including myself as caregiver) safe?
(Physically and emotionally)
- What is the current action/behavior/evidence of feelings?
(Look for verbal and nonverbal expressions of emotions.)
- Why is this situation occurring?
- What will likely happen next if there is no intervention?
- Who will be hurt (physically and/or emotionally)?
- What needs to be done first to prevent someone getting hurt?
- What is the status and role of the four factors in this situation?
(Person, Environment, Caregiver, Task)

2. **Discerning feelings:**

Recognizing and responding to the person's feelings and the caregiver's own feelings:

What matters most to the person with cognitive impairment at this moment?

How will I acknowledge and transcend my own personal reactions in order to attend to the immediate needs of the person(s) in distress, for example:

- How do I feel?
- Why do I feel this way?
- How will my feelings affect the outcome here?
- How will I set aside my feelings now and deal with my feelings later?
- How does this person feel?
- Why does this person feel this way?
- How are this person's feelings playing a role here?
- How will I best respond (verbally or nonverbally) to this person's feelings?
- What is the status and role of this person's other feelings, physical strengths and needs, cognitive strengths and needs, etc.?
(Closely observe this person's face, body, words, sounds, actions.)

3. **Generating intervention options:**

Choosing the best intervention to try first:

What needs to be done and what results are best for all involved?

- What are all the intervention options possible at this time?
- What is the best outcome in this situation?
- How will I help this person feel better and be safe?
- How will I help all persons in this situation feel better and be safe?
- How will I avoid embarrassing this person and other persons?
- How will I know when this person and others are feeling better and are safe?
- Of the intervention options, which will be most effective most quickly?
- Of the intervention options, which will involve as little change as possible?
- Of the intervention options, which will least upset each person involved?

4. **Evaluating the attempted intervention:**

Looking for evidence the intervention worked and for other options of intervention:

What are the results of the intervention?

Is the distress alleviated?

- Are this person and all other persons (including myself) feeling better?
(Better enough to declare the situation resolved?)
- Is the person most distressed or who first recognized the distress in the situation, feeling better and acknowledged?
- Will this intervention reduce the likelihood of the situation reoccurring?
- What other interventions might have worked as well or even better?

5. **Describing the situation for proactive intervention planning and documentation:**

What factual and neutral words will I use to describe and document the feelings, events, and behaviors that occurred in this particular situation, for example:

- Who needs to know about this situation? (and why, how, where?)
- How will I be objective and accurate in my description?
- How will I avoid implying motives or emotions when describing behaviors?
- How will I describe the expressions of feelings I see, hear and feel?
- How will I avoid ascribing the feelings or behavior to a diagnosis?
- How will I use words to “draw a picture” of the situation?