

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?