

Cognitive Impairment Intervention Protocol (CIIP) for Caregiver Interactions with a Person with Cognitive Impairment: VI. DISTRACTION

Look for ways to:

- Use distraction or diversion to help this person
- Compensate for and reduce inappropriate distraction for this person

A. Do I know when distraction or diversion is helpful with this person, such as when she/he is looking for a dead spouse, or when she/he is performing a task that is easier to do when she/he isn't thinking about it?

1. Since each individual and situation is different, adapt your response to this person to fit her/his individual needs and desires at this particular time.
2. Avoid distractions unless distraction would be helpful in this particular situation.
3. Respond directly to this person's questions or concerns if possible. Use distraction when a direct response would be painful, harmful, or inappropriate; for example, if she/he would grieve when told the spouse she/he is repeatedly looking for is dead.
4. Use distraction if a direct response seems ineffective. For example, this person asks the same question over and over and seems unsatisfied with the response.
5. Distract when focusing directly on an issue or task is too difficult for this person. For example, provide a mild distraction if this person can perform a task such as getting dressed, tying her/his shoes, or swallowing medication more easily when she/he isn't thinking about it.
6. Use only as much distraction as is helpful. Using too much distraction can cause confusion. For example, if you are using distraction, such as conversation about this person's daughter to help this person perform a task more easily, then make as many comments as is necessary to prevent her/him from focusing attention on the task, but not so many that this person stops doing the task or gets confused.
7. Watch this person's responses to your interventions to discern whether to use distraction and how much is needed in a particular situation.

B. When there is a distressing behavior, do I use humor and diversion instead of demands, argument, shame, or instructions to stop the behavior?

1. Respond to the feelings behind the behavior; then use humor and diversion if necessary to help this person meet her/his needs and feel comfortable.
2. Respond to her/his feelings before telling this person what to do. For example, avoid saying "stop" or "come here" first, since she/he may not be able to respond to instructions when emotions are strong.
3. Use humor to distract or to emphasize positive feelings as a method to reduce distress. Avoid focusing on the behavior, distress, or negative feelings since this might increase the distress. For example, avoid embarrassing her/him, asking why she/he is engaged in this behavior, or insisting that she/he stop the behavior.

4. Adapt your humor to this person's level of functioning and feelings at the time, so the humor is appropriately simple, concrete, and emotionally supportive.

C. Do I avoid calling this person's attention to her/his behavior?

1. Remind yourself that this person may be unaware of her/his behavior or may not be able to stop or modify it.
2. Discreetly distract this person, since calling her/his attention to the behavior may embarrass her/him and/or make it worse.
3. Avoid giving instructions or requests when this person is distressed, since she/he likely cannot process instructions at the same time she/he is focused on the behavior or is feeling strong emotions.

D. Do I try to discern the feelings behind distressing words and behaviors, and then respond to the feelings rather than simply to the words and behaviors?

1. Examine this person's words and behaviors to discern the feelings behind the behaviors.
2. Respond to her/his feelings; for example, by soothing with reassuring words and touch.
3. Respond to this person's words and behaviors only if necessary in order to address feelings.

E. During tasks, do I encourage this person to hold or use an item while I use a similar item, such as a comb or washcloth?

1. Offer this person a task object to use or hold to help orient her/him to the task and to what you are doing and to encourage participation in the task.
2. Encourage this person to hold a task object to reduce her/his tendency to grasp onto you or other objects in the environment.

F. Do I get and keep this person's attention before speaking and throughout our interaction?

1. Remind yourself that this person may be easily distracted by other stimuli in the environment.
2. Be the strongest stimulus in the environment, both before and throughout your interaction with this person
3. Get and keep this person's attention through touch, (when appropriate), placing your face close to hers/his, speaking more loudly, or positioning yourself and contrasting with your surroundings so as to be more visible to her/him.

G. Do I reduce distraction such as noise and clutter around me when I am talking to this person?

1. Reduce noise or irrelevant stimuli when getting and keeping this person's attention. For example, close the door, turn off the TV, radio, cell phone, or intercom. Remove her/him from crowded noisy spaces.
2. Reduce the visual clutter, such as the number of items in the bathroom, clothes in the closet, or items on the dinner table.
3. Avoid standing in front of a complex visual pattern. Position yourself so that when she/he is looking at you, she/he is looking away from groups of people, moving objects, excessive clutter, or patterned wall paper.
4. Avoid wearing excessively patterned shirts or blouses.