

## How to deal with challenging behaviour in adults

An individual's behaviour can be defined as "challenging" if it puts them or those around them (such as their carer) at risk or leads to a poorer quality of life.

It can also impact their ability to join in everyday activities (including sport & physical activity).

### Challenging behaviour may include:

- Aggressive behaviour
- Self-harming
- Disruptiveness
- Destructiveness

Challenging behaviour is often seen in individuals with health problems that affect communication and the brain, such as dementia or learning disabilities.

### What can you do to help?

As a session deliverer, try to understand why the individual you coach is behaving in this way. E.g. they may feel anxious, be bored, or be in pain/distress.

If you can recognise early warning signs, you may be able to prevent behavioural outbursts. e.g if being in a large group of people makes the person you are coaching feel anxious and they become agitated, you could arrange for them to be in a smaller group or have one-to-one instruction.

Some people find a distraction can focus an individual's energies elsewhere and prevent them displaying challenging behaviour.

The person you coach might behave in a challenging way to get your attention. If this is the case, consider not responding directly to their behaviour – although you shouldn't ignore them completely. But if their behaviour puts them or someone else at risk, you'll need to intervene as calmly as possible.

### Professional help

If you're finding it hard to cope with the behaviour of an individual you are coaching, you could seek support from a GP who could refer you to a specialist. The specialist will want to know what situations or people trigger the behaviour, what the early warning signs are, and what happens afterwards.

In extreme circumstances – for example, if the person's behaviour is harmful to themselves or others and all methods of calming them have been tried – a doctor may prescribe medication.

### Tips for deliverers/coaches

- seek support with the individual's carer – many organisations for people with learning disabilities or dementia have schemes to connect carers with others in a similar situation

- share your experiences – This can help get support from other coaches/deliverers or give you good advice on how to cope from others who have been through something similar
- keep in touch with friends and family members of the participant – they can be an important source of practical support
- don't be tempted to restrain the person you are coaching unless you or their carer believe their behaviour is putting them at risk and they don't have the mental ability or capacity to make a decision.

### **Sexual behaviour in adults**

Sexually inappropriate behaviour in adults who need care can be a result of a mental health or neurological condition, such as dementia.

It may include:

- undressing in public
- fondling genitals
- touching someone inappropriately

For more information on sex and disabilities, call the Outsiders helpline on 07770 884 985.

You may not be able to stop an individual engaging in inappropriate sexual behaviour, but there are ways you can address it:

- think about or ask the person why they're acting in a certain way. For example, if they start to undress in public, are they hot or uncomfortable?
- stay calm
- treat the situation with humour, rather than getting angry
- distract their attention, rather than getting confrontational
- if other people are present, explain to them that the behaviour is because of an illness and isn't personal
- Ask the persons carer to keep a diary to see if they can find a pattern in the behaviour – for example, whether it's more likely to occur in certain situations, with the same people present, or at certain times of the day or night

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*Adapted from the NHS Guidance 'How to deal with challenging behaviour' -*

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/practical-tips-if-you-care-for-someone/how-to-deal-with-challenging-behaviour-in-adults/>