

Information for home care workers

Trauma and dementia: What do I need to do?

A person with dementia who has experienced trauma may find it hard to express their feelings or explain how trauma is affecting them. Instead they may show distress in other ways like:

- being agitated, irritable or aggressive
- withdrawing from people
- refusing care
- not engaging in activities

There are many things you can do to help the person manage their distress

Help them feel safe

- Create a connection with the person by talking about things important to them, such as good times in their life.
- Try to act in a gentle and relaxed way, and smile. Body language is important.
- Work slowly and calmly. Try not to rush them.
- Explain the tasks that you are going to do so the person understands what is going to happen. Ask for permission. Allow them time to think and respond.
- Keep a routine each day so they know what to expect.
- Try not to make many demands of them.

Reduce causes of distress

- Try to identify what causes their distress – what was happening when they became distressed? Something may have reminded them of a past trauma.
- Change their environment – encourage the person to move away from what is distressing them.
- Find out if the person is in pain – people can't always tell you they are in pain. Pain can be a reminder of past trauma and cause distress.

Help the person calm down

- Listen to their concerns and reassure them.
- Find out what helps them calm down, for example, holding hands or going for a walk.
- Distract the person with an object or activity of interest to them.
- Reduce stimulation such as bright lights and noisy TV.
- Ask them to take some long, slow, calming breaths.

"I know that when I take the time to sit and have a chat with Rhonda, she's much more relaxed and more comfortable with me touching her. It may only add a few minutes to my time with her and it's worth it."