

Dementia Caregiving Strategies for Responding to Suspicion and Hallucinations

Why Does It Happen?

False perceptions occur typically in the later stages of progressive dementia due to changes within the brain.

Hallucinations / Illusions

Reasons for hallucinations may be due to:

- A general confusion
- A medication side effect
- An infection

Check with the doctor to rule out medication side effects or infections, but also monitor the environment.

For example:

- **If a person keeps hearing voices:** Is a television or radio on in another room that may be causing the issue?
- **If a person feels like he or she is constantly being watched:** Check to see if there are curtains that can be closed over the windows.
- **If the person sees insects moving on the walls:** Is there a patterned wallpaper in the room that may be causing the vision?

When illusions do occur, don't argue about whether or not they are real, but instead:

- Assess the situation.
- Reassure the person in a calm voice.
- Alter the environment as needed or respond to the person's emotions.

For example:

- "I don't see the bugs moving on the wall, but you seem worried, so let's move into the living room until they can be dealt with."
- "You think you saw someone in that dark corner? Let's turn the light on over there so we can see better. Would that make you more comfortable?"



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Suspicion / Accusations

Reasons for suspicion may be due to:

- A general confusion
- Memory loss
- A way to express fear

A person with dementia may accuse others of stealing items, of improper behavior or of betrayal.

How to respond:

- Take “no” out of your vocabulary. Don’t argue, take offense or try to convince the person otherwise.
- Reassure the person, allowing him or her to express feelings.
- Try and offer a simple answer to the accusation.
- Redirect, perhaps distracting the person with a different activity.
- Respond to the need rather than the words.
- Keep duplicates of frequently lost items, such as a purse or wallet. If one is lost, the duplicate can be shown.



It is no doubt that caregiving for a loved one with dementia can be challenging at times. It is important to lean on the support of others for advice, resources and respite from the everyday tasks. Call on the home care services of CareWorks Health Services. We provide home caregivers who are professionally trained in the art of patient, innovative dementia care strategies to make sure your loved one is safe, comfortable and living life to the fullest.

Sources: Alzheimer’s Association, Dementia Care Central