

When a person engages in challenging behavior, check for pain or illness.

Some **physical problems** that may contribute to a person engaging in challenging behaviors include:

- ✓ Constipation and stomach disorders
- ✓ Headaches
- ✓ Dental problems



All behaviors serve a purpose, even if it is not always obvious.

When a person does not feel well, acting out behaviorally may provide an escape from the painful, frightening or threatening situation. It is a powerful way to signal a need for help. For some people, it may be the only way they can communicate when they are not feeling well and need assistance.

Challenging behaviors may occur more often when a person is sick or in pain and can increase if attempts to communicate to unheeded.

The higher the level of pain or discomfort, the greater is the frequency and intensity of the behavior.



- ✓ Grimacing, guarding, combativeness, groaning
- ✓ Agitation, fidgeting, sleep disturbance, diminished appetite, irritability, disruptive behavior, rigidity, rapid blinking
- ✓ Resisting/refusing care
- ✓ Toileting, thirst, hunger, visual or hearing impairment
- ✓ Evidence of pathology present (fracture, infection, etc.)

It can be difficult to recognize that certain behaviors may indicate pain if you are unfamiliar with how the person usually behaves. Families and other caregivers can be very helpful in recognizing changes.

If behavior changes are noted, it's important to check for any medical or physical cause.

If you would experience pain in similar circumstances, assume that the nonverbal person will as well.



Look for:

- ✓ Facial expressions that show fear, anger, tightness
- ✓ Verbalizations such as sighing, moaning, groaning
- ✓ Body movements that are rigid, tense, fidgety, pacing, rocking
- ✓ Changes in food patterns, sleep time, rest periods, stopping common routines
- ✓ Mental status changes such as crying, confusion or irritability

Remember ...

Some people demonstrate little or no specific behaviors associated with pain, but for those who give clues, watch for them!