

The Calm-Down Cheat Sheet

What to say (and what never to say) for 5 of the hardest dementia moments

First, stay C.A.L.M.

C Check the cause

- Pain, hunger, thirst, bathroom
- Too loud, too dark, too hot
- Tired or overwhelmed

A Adjust yourself

- Slow down, lower your voice
- Approach from the front
- One short sentence at a time

L Listen to the feeling

- 'You seem worried.'
- Agree with the feeling
- Never argue or correct

M Move the moment

- Snack, drink or a walk
- A simple task for their hands
- Try again in 20 minutes

Your calm is contagious. So is your stress.

01 Wandering or Trying to Leave the House

SAY THIS

"You look ready to go. Where are we headed?"

vs

NOT THAT

"You can't go anywhere. Sit down."

Why it works: Asking about the plan uncovers the need behind the walking.

DO THIS

Walk with them, then loop back home.

vs

NOT THAT

Block the door or grab their arm.

Why it works: Going along lowers fear. Blocking turns a walk into a fight.

08 Refusing to Bathe or Shower

SAY THIS

"Let's freshen up before your visitor comes."

vs

NOT THAT

"You need a bath. You smell."

Why it works: A reason they care about beats a reason that shames.

DO THIS

Warm the room and wrap them in a towel.

vs

NOT THAT

Undress them in a cold bathroom.

Why it works: Feeling cold and exposed is the top reason people refuse.

24 Asking the Same Question Over and Over

SAY THIS

"We're going at 2. It's written right here."

vs

NOT THAT

"I already told you!"

Why it works: Each time feels like the first time to them.

DO THIS

Write answers on a whiteboard.

vs

NOT THAT

Answer out loud every time.

Why it works: The board answers for you, again and again.

25 "I Want to Go Home" (Even When They Are Home)

SAY THIS

"Tell me about your home."

VS

NOT THAT

"You ARE home!"

Why it works: 'Home' is often a feeling of safety. Answer the feeling.

DO THIS

Look at old photos together.

VS

NOT THAT

Show them proof they live here.

Why it works: Comfort works. Proof doesn't.

33 Sundowning: Late-Afternoon Confusion and Agitation

SAY THIS

"Let's have some tea and listen to music."

VS

NOT THAT

"Why are you acting like this again?"

Why it works: A calm activity resets the evening.

DO THIS

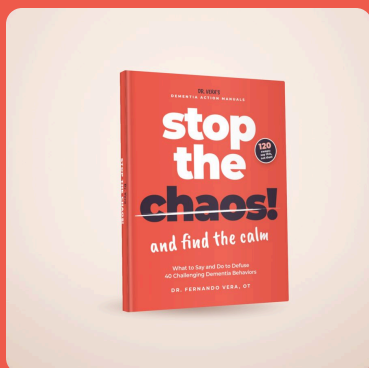
Turn on bright lights before 4 p.m.

VS

NOT THAT

Let the house get dark.

Why it works: Fading light is a major sundowning trigger.



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