

Special Needs Planning and Medicaid Law Newsletter



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A FREE LEGAL UPDATE FOR ELDERLY AND OTHERS WHO SEEK ASSET PROTECTION ♦ MARCH, 2016 EDITION

DEMENTIA AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

People with dementia may sometimes behave aggressively, either physically or verbally, and this can be very distressing for the person and for their caregiver, family and friends.

What is aggressive behavior?

Aggressive behavior is not unique to people with dementia. However, more than one third of people living with dementia have at times behaved aggressively, particularly in the moderate to severe stages of the condition.

Aggressive behavior can be very stressful and upsetting for the person with dementia and their caregivers. It can also be a factor in the decision to move the person with dementia into a nursing home.

Aggressive behavior may be: verbal (swearing, screaming, shouting, making threats) or physical (hitting, pinching, scratching, hair-pulling, biting).

Aggression is one type of challenging behavior that can result from dementia. Other behaviors that challenge include agitation, restlessness, and being sexually inappropriate. It can also be hard for caregivers to deal with restlessness, repeated questioning and being followed around.

Causes of aggressive behavior

People with dementia have the same needs as everyone else, including comfort, social interaction, stimulation, emotional well being and being free from pain. However, people with dementia may be unable to recognize their needs, know how to meet them, or communicate what they need to others.

This may cause them to act in ways that are seen as challenging, including aggression. The aggressive behavior might be the person's way of meeting the need, an attempt to communicate it, or an outcome of the unmet need.

Understanding what is causing the person's behavior can help caregivers to find a solution. Some possible explanations for aggression are biological, social or psychological.

Preventing and managing aggressive behavior

Finding ways to prevent and manage the behavior will improve the quality of life for both the person with dementia and the caregiver. It will also make the caregiving role easier. Working out what is causing the aggressive behavior will make it easier to find a solution.

It is important to consider the person's perceptions - whether accurate or not - when looking at ways to manage aggression. It can also help to tailor your communication with the person in ways that let them know that he is being listened to and respected.

To reduce or prevent aggressive behavior, caregivers will need to look at the person as an individual and work out why they are behaving in a certain way. It is important to see what is happening from the perspective of the person with dementia and to identify the reason for the behavior.

Caregivers' responses to aggressive behavior

Caregivers of people with dementia can find aggression to be challenging, frustrating and often very upsetting. Some caregivers may hide the person's aggressive behavior from their family and friends and become reluctant to seek help.

This can lead to them feeling isolated and losing their social life, and some caregivers may become depressed. It is very important to seek support if the person you are caring for is acting aggressively.

Fewer incidents of aggressive behavior will lead to a better relationship between you and the person you care for and a better quality of life for you both.

It is important to remember that the person is not being aggressive deliberately. The behavior is due to their unmet needs. The behavior may appear to be targeted at you, but that is probably just because you are there. The fact that the person is aggressive towards you doesn't mean that their feelings for you have changed.

Even if you manage not to take it personally, any aggressive behavior may well leave you feeling shaken. Over time, this kind of behavior might contribute towards feeling exhausted. Find ways to help yourself recover, both immediately after an incident and in the longer term, and tap into sources of support.

This may be joining a caregivers' support group, attending counseling, talking to the memory clinic or having input from an occupational therapist.

Try not to bottle up your feelings or resentments - find ways to talk things through. If you do lose your temper, try not to feel guilty - it is a highly stressful situation that you are dealing with - but do discuss things with a friend, professional or another caregiver who may be able to suggest ways of handling these situations more effectively.

Everyone is different and caregivers will find a range of ways to cope. These suggestions may help.

Talk things through or just have a cup of tea with a friend, relative or neighbor.

Take some time to unwind on your own. Ask a friend or relative to look after the person with dementia or use a day care centre or respite care so that you can have a break.

Talk to the primary physician, community psychiatric, nurse or other professional.

If you are a caregiver, join a caregivers' group to share experiences and offer mutual support. Many caregivers find that support groups can make a big difference.

News You Can Use

2016 FLORIDA MEDICAID LIMITS

Gross Monthly Income Limit for Medicaid Applicant:	\$2,199.00
Personal Needs Allowance:	\$105.00
Asset Limit (Individual):	\$2,000.00
Asset Limit (Couple):	\$3,000.00
Medicare Part B Premium:	\$104.90
Community Spouse Resource Allowance:	\$119,220.00
Minimum Monthly Maintenance Income Allowance:	\$1,966.25
Maximum Monthly Maintenance Income Allowance:	\$2,980.50