



## De-Escalation Tips

### For Episodes of Increased Irritability & Aggression

*Irritability* is a prolonged emotional state or mood in which a person can be short-tempered or easily annoyed. Often, it results from periods of fatigue, excessive stress, or pushing ourselves beyond our limits. *Aggression* is a behavior motivated by an intent to cause harm to another person who wishes to avoid harm. In other words, an altercation between two people only one of whom wants to cause the other harm is more than a fight, it's aggression. Aggression can be defensive or offensive.

In HD, Irritability and aggression can be triggered by modest or trivial stimuli. It isn't premeditated and serves no obvious goal. There is no buildup and brief outbursts of rage may be followed by long periods of calm. Recognizing signs of HD-related irritability will help you to intervene quickly and reduce the risk of escalation. Precursors of irritability can include restlessness, increased rate or volume of speech, repetitive questions or comments, staring, intense eye contact, and moving into your personal space. Below is a list of early intervention tips to help de-escalate the situation.

#### Physical and Environmental Techniques

**Use non-threatening body language** – Have an open body stance, relaxed, arms down at your side, not crossed or on hips. Move slowly. Don't over-react.

**Give the person space** – Stand at least 1.5 to 5 feet away or more if the person is escalating.

**Try not to touch the person** – If you must touch the person, tell them what you are going to do.

**Make the environment as calm & safe as possible for everyone involved** – If you are in the car, slow down or pull over. If you're in a restaurant, leave. Take the kids to another room. Reduce environmental stimulation.

#### Communication Techniques

**Use a soft tone of voice** – Dramatically reduce the pace of your speech to give the person with HD time to process what you are saying. Use a calm, soft tone of voice. Say "I'll listen if you tell me what's wrong", and then *wait* as long as it takes for the response.

**Affirm feelings** – When someone does something you perceive as unusual, be open to what the person is feeling instead of passing judgment. Feelings are very real to the irritable person. Affirm feelings even if you can't agree with the content of what the person is saying.

**Give reassurance** – Tell the person you are not there to hurt them and want to help. Ask how you can help.

**Use “I” messages** – “You” messages, such as “you make me feel...” or “you did...” will escalate the situation. “You” messages tell someone what they think feel or heard, and the person with HD can always argue with that! “I” messages, however, tell the person what you think, feel or heard. Some examples are “I noticed” or “I see”. Messages like this tend to not upset others.

**Don't provoke the person to prove a point** – While you can't control the person's behavior, how you respond to them will have a direct effect. Don't fight back. Don't prove your point by describing the error in the person's logic. This is not the time for giving feedback to improve insight. You will not convince the person with HD that they are wrong. Focus on the feelings the person is trying to share. You can say things like “It must be frustrating...”

**Let the other person do most of the talking** – Listen, ask questions to clarify if needed.

**Validate the other person's feelings** – Reflect feelings and needs back to them without passing judgment. “You are upset that you are losing your independence. I understand why that is so hard.”

### Other Techniques

**Gently remind the person of agreements or rules** – An upset person may not be able to focus on everything you say and may not recall previous agreements. Remind them that you can't let them hurt themselves or others. Be clear and upfront.

**Give the person with HD choices** – Limit choices to two or at most three options. “We can watch either a movie or go for a walk.” Too many choices can be overwhelming for a person with HD.

**Ask the person with HD if they are hungry, tired, or uncomfortable** – Everyone who is hungry, tired, or uncomfortable can be irritable. Don't overlook these common causes.

**Saving face can be very important to someone who feels he or she has nothing left but dignity** – Always look for ways for everyone to back down or retreat.

**Summarize** – At the end of the encounter, sum up what you have agreed to do and what information will be shared. Try to end on a positive note.