

Calming an Anxious Person with Dementia

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What are some ways to calm an anxious person with dementia? **All** behavior is meaningful, expressing what the person cannot express in words. Look beyond the words spoken and the behavior; they most likely are expressing feeling lost, insecure or frustrated.

It is important to understand what causes people with dementia to be anxious. They are afraid of anything new or unexpected; frustrated when they are not understood; frustrated and perhaps ashamed trying something that is too difficult and failing or being scolded or rushed by a tired, irritated care partner! They may simply need things slowed down or need reassurance that they are valued and safe.

- Get **and maintain** eye contact, speak slowly, reassure.
- Take a breath; slow your pace to match theirs.
- Apologize for rushing or scolding. Apology does wonders to calm a person with dementia.
- Stop what you are doing that is causing the anxiety. Start again with a new approach; one that will promote success and create a positive atmosphere.

My family member is very anxious and fretful whenever I drive her home after dark. She flails her hands and cries, “Where are we going?” “I don’t want to go!”, “Take me home!” My response is NOT to answer her questions, but to ask her if she feels safe with me. I take her hand and simply say, “You are always safe with me.” I often hold and stroke her hand all the way home. **Home** is a place of safety and comfort. We can create a safe feeling by **our** behavior.