

# Identification & Management of Behavioral Expressions of Distress

- **Determine if the expression needs to be addressed.**
  - ◇ Focus on one action at a time if more than one need is being expressed (i.e., aggression and wandering).
  - ◇ Is the behavior disrupting, endangering, or distressing others?
- **If the behavior needs addressing, try to accommodate and understand it, not control it.**
- **Check the Care Plan for notes about the behavioral expression and previous successful interventions.**
- **Assess the situation for triggers: noise, clutter, lack of activity, lack of sleep, deviation from routine, etc.**

Common Behavioral Expressions of Distress	Common Triggers/ Unmet Needs
Wandering	Boredom; biological need (pain, hunger, thirst, etc.)
Repetitive speech or actions	Anxiety; boredom; overstimulation
Agitation, irritability, aggression	Pain; feeling confused or powerless; overstimulation

For first-line interventions, just remember **PPSB**:



**POTTY**



**PAIN**



**SNACK**



**BORED**

Ensuring regular toileting, pain medication, snacks, and adequate, personalized stimulation goes a long way in reducing and preventing behavioral expressions of distress.

## Do

- **Remain calm, cool, and collected.**
- **Check the Care Plan.**
- **Alert other staff/ask for help if needed.**
- **Pay close attention to your own body language.**
  - ◇ Keep hands in view, palms up and open.
  - ◇ Respect their personal space.
  - ◇ Move slowly and steadily.
  - ◇ Always leave yourself an escape route.
- **Listen and speak carefully.**
  - ◇ Respond to the actual meaning of what they're saying, not the words.
  - ◇ Use short, simple phrases.
  - ◇ Communicate concern, caring and reassurance.
- **Document behaviors and corresponding interventions.**

## Don't

- **Get angry, defensive, or resentful; this will make matters worse.**
- **Use body language that could be construed as threatening:**
  - ◇ Don't surprise them.
  - ◇ Don't stand directly in front of or over them (if sitting).
  - ◇ Don't glare or stare.
- **Use words that could be construed as threatening:**
  - ◇ Don't use sarcasm.
  - ◇ Don't make insulting comments.
  - ◇ Don't use humor—it may be misinterpreted.
  - ◇ Don't raise your voice.
  - ◇ Don't give advice, argue or try to reason.
- **Try to handle potentially dangerous situations alone.**
- **Forget to document behaviors and corresponding interventions.**