

“Are We On the Same Page?”

The meaning of words related to agitated and aggressive behavior

There are many different ideas about what agitated and aggressive behaviors look like.

There are also many different words used to describe such behaviors.

In this session we will work with the following definitions:

Anxiety:

“Troubled in mind.”

- An unpleasant feeling of apprehension or panic that is not accompanied by an obvious environmental threat. Includes physical symptoms like sweating, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dry mouth, trembling (fight-or-flight reactions). Example: wringing of hands, distressed facial expression/posture.
- Anxiety may be followed by agitation if the person’s needs are not met.

Agitation:

increased intensity or frequency of behaviors.

- This state indicates intense physical or emotional discomfort, high arousal and tension levels, and irritability. May include inappropriate verbal, vocal, or motor behaviors. Usually not directed specifically at another person. Can be the result of medication effects, infection, drug use or withdrawal, or disease onset.
- Examples: Increased pacing; increased volume or frequency of screaming or calling out; picking at clothing or bed linens; unusual withdrawal from activity.
- Agitation occurs in about 75% of residents with dementia in long-term care.

Anger:

a normal human emotion characterized by internal feelings of extreme displeasure.

- How anger is expressed varies from person to person and from culture to culture. Some expressions of anger are healthy and functional. Others do harm. Example: “How dare you wear my shoes without asking!”

Combativeness:

refusal expressed by negative words, physical pushing away of another.

- A readiness to oppose the wishes of another person. Person may be argumentative. Lacks the element of intense fear seen in actions of self-defense. Example: Repeatedly pushing away of caregiver's hand during a bath.

Aggression:

a forceful, self-assertive action or attitude.

- Can be expressed physically or verbally. An offensive attack that violates by force the rights of another. Involves destructive, threatening, or harmful acts directed toward self or others. Can have many triggers. Example: Yelling in a person's face; shoving the person; destroying another person's possessions.
- Aggressive behavior rarely occurs without a reason.

Abuse:

Improper use of resources or a person.

- Elder abuse can bring injury or pain in 3 ways: physically, psychologically, and financially.

Violence:

characterized by intense, harmful, or destructive force.

- Can bring harm to self, others, or the environment. May include use of a weapon or tool. Also may be premeditated.
- Example: Vandalizing furniture with a knife; breaking the valuables of another resident. Hurricanes and headaches can also be 'violent.'

Rage:

total loss of control of one's behavior.

- Consequences can include destructiveness and harm to self or others. Physical violence can be present, but not always. Not premeditated. Can represent an escalation of emotions over time, or occur spontaneously. Additional causes may include: temporal lobe seizures; mania; effects of potent street drugs.
- Example: Wife-beating; 'going postal.' Some floods are described as being 'raging.'