

Common Emotional Changes in Dementia¹

Contributes to Behaviours	Description of Emotional Change	Examples of possible behaviour	Screening Tool and Clinical Indicators
Personality changes	Family reports changes in resident's usual personality and temperament	Previously easy going resident may swear, become uptight or irritable	RAI: Aggressive Behaviour Scale
Loss of interest	Loss of interest in pleasurable activities or social involvement	May appear disinterested, expression may look withdrawn or depressed, may appear uncooperative with care	RAI: Index of Social Engagement Scale, Activities CAP, Social Relationship CAP
Lability	May switch quickly from appearing happy to sad or angry	During a conversation, may quickly switch from expressing joy to sadness while talking about memories	RAI: Depression Rating Scale, Mood CAP; Cornell Scale for Depression in Dementia
Sadness, Depression	Inability to control emotions due to damage in the emotional centre of the brain	May appear sad, withdrawn, changes in sleep and appetite; atypical presentation may include appearing anxious or irritable	RAI: Depression Rating Scale, Mood CAP; Geriatric Depressions Scale, Cornell Depression Scale
Irritability, anger	Inability to control behaviours due to brain damage	May have sudden mood swings; resident may yell out, swear, scream at people or when care is provided	RAI: Aggressive Behaviour Scale, Behaviour CAP, Mood CAP, Depression Rating Scale; Cohen Mansfield Agitation Inventory (CMAI)
Anxiety	Anxious behaviours due to brain and chemical changes	May fidget, pace, not be able to sit still, repeat questions; makes frequent phone calls to their family members and/or 911	RAI: Depression Rating scale, Mood CAP
Suspicion, paranoia	Distrust of others – accusatory related to misplaced, lost items or events; feeling others want to hurt or steal from them	Thinks that the food or medication is poisoned; family members are stealing their clothes or money	
Social disinhibition, impulsiveness, perseveration	Lack of self-restraint and poor social skills/etiquette; emotions expressed may not be consistent or appropriate with situation	Taking other's personal items; removing clothing in the dining room; persistent focus on an action, person, object	RAI: Aggressive Behaviour Scale, Behaviour CAP

RAI: refers to the RAI MDS 2.0 tool

¹ Disclaimer: Examples are not exhaustive and may not apply for all dementias.