

Avoiding Breakaway Techniques in Managing Behaviour with Elderly Individuals

This guide provides strategies to prevent situations from escalating to the point where physical breakaway techniques are needed. By focusing on prevention, de-escalation, and person-centred care, we can ensure safety, dignity, and positive outcomes for elderly individuals.

1. Prevent Behaviour Escalation

- Identify triggers early (noise, hunger, pain, confusion, temperature, crowding)
- Create predictable routines to reduce anxiety
- Provide choices to preserve dignity and reduce frustration
- Adapt the environment for comfort (quiet, uncluttered, well-lit)

2. Use Person-Centred Communication

- Speak slowly, calmly, and at eye level
- Use the person's name and familiar references
- Listen actively and acknowledge feelings
- Avoid confrontation or correction in the moment—redirect instead

3. Apply De-escalation Strategies

- Maintain a relaxed, open posture
- Give personal space
- Use distraction (music, photos, familiar objects)
- Offer reassurance and comfort
- Use positive, solution-focused language

4. Promote Comfort and Well-being

- Check for pain or discomfort
- Offer food, drink, and toileting opportunities
- Adjust lighting, seating, and temperature as needed

5. Use Behaviour Support Plans

- Develop personalised plans for each individual
- Include triggers, early warning signs, and preferred calming methods
- Share plans with all staff and review regularly

6. Train Staff in Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)

- View behaviour as communication
- Practise de-escalation and empathy skills
- Role-play scenarios to build consistent, confident responses

Physical breakaway techniques should only be used as a last resort when there is an immediate risk of harm and all other methods have been exhausted. Prevention and respectful engagement are the safest, most effective ways to support elderly individuals.