

Critical Thinking in Dementia Behaviour Management

In dementia behaviour management, critical thinking means using careful, reflective, and informed reasoning to understand why a behaviour is happening and to decide the safest, most respectful way to respond. It involves pausing, analysing, and making decisions based on evidence, empathy, and the person's unique needs.

How Critical Thinking Applies

When supporting someone with dementia, challenging behaviours are usually expressions of unmet needs rather than deliberate actions. Critical thinking helps staff to:

1. Gather Information:

- What happened, when, and where?
- Who was present?
- What was the person doing before the behaviour began?

2. Analyse the Situation:

- Could it be pain, hunger, thirst, tiredness, or toileting needs?
- Is the environment uncomfortable or overstimulating?
- Is this behaviour new or part of a pattern?

3. Consider the Person's History and Preferences:

- Cultural background and personal history
- Past experiences or traumas
- Usual communication style and coping strategies

4. Weigh Response Options:

- Which approach will reduce distress without escalating?
- How can safety be maintained while preserving dignity?
- Do I need to adjust my tone, body language, or pace?

5. Decide and Act:

- Choose the least restrictive, most compassionate option
- Apply person-centred de-escalation techniques

6. Reflect and Learn:

- Did the response work?
- What could be done differently next time?
- Does the care plan need to be updated?

Example

Situation: A resident refuses to eat dinner and pushes the plate away.

- Reactive response: "You have to eat, you haven't eaten all day."

- Critical thinking response:
 1. Notice facial expression—are they in pain?
 2. Check the environment—too noisy or dimly lit?
 3. Consider timing—did they recently have a snack?
 4. Offer a familiar food or move to a quieter spot.

This approach leads to a calmer, more respectful interaction and may prevent escalation.

Why It Matters

- Reduces unnecessary confrontation
- Maintains dignity and autonomy
- Improves trust between carer and person
- Prevents situations requiring restraint or breakaway techniques
- Enhances overall care quality