



Disinhibition occurs when a person can no longer control their impulses. This can sometimes be a symptom of dementia. This can mean that the person may say or do things that are inappropriate. The person may appear rude or insensitive.

Disinhibited behaviours can place strain on families and caregivers. It can often seem like the person's personality has changed.

## What does disinhibition look like?

- **Rude remarks.** A person with dementia may appear to have lost their social manners. It can seem like they are trying to embarrass or harass others. They may use offensive language.
- **Changes in emotions.** Sometimes, a person with dementia has trouble holding back or regulating their emotions. This can mean they get angry or upset more easily.
- **Inappropriate sexual behaviours.** A person with dementia may make inappropriate sexual comments. They might remove their clothes or masturbate in inappropriate places.
- **Impulsivity.** Increased gambling, smoking, drinking, or shopping can all be symptoms of disinhibition.

## What causes disinhibition?

- **Brain changes.** Often, dementia-related behaviours happen because the person is losing brain cells. Cell loss can happen in areas of the brain that control impulses.
- **The person's environment** plays an important role too. This could be their internal environment (changes inside the body) or their external environment (their surroundings). In other words, something may be triggering the behaviour. Common causes of disinhibited behaviours include:
  - Confusion about time or space
  - Frustration
  - Paranoia or anxiety
  - Pain or discomfort
  - Memory loss
  - Communication challenges
  - Loss of insight
  - Unmet physical, social, or psychological needs

## What can I do to help manage disinhibition?

- **Visit the doctor.** It is important to rule out physical illness, medication side-effects, or discomfort.
- **React with patience and gentleness.** Behaviours are symptoms of the dementia and are not usually intentional.
- **Reassure them.** If you suspect the person is confused, frustrated, or anxious, let them know that they are safe.
- **Use the information.** Behaviours can be a sign that the person needs something. The person may have trouble communicating unmet needs like boredom or hunger.
  - **Use the A-B-C approach** to better understand the person's needs. This approach is provided in the *Understanding Behaviour Changes* fact sheet available [Here](#).
- **Take breaks.** Disinhibited behaviours can be challenging and upsetting. Make sure to step back when you need to recharge and reach out to your support system.

## Resources and Information:

- Talk to a dementia care coach about your unique caregiving situation:  
<https://dementiahelp.ca/programs-services/dementia-care-coach/>
- Register for Supporting Dementia to learn more about symptoms and management strategies:  
<https://www.eventbrite.com/c/supporting-dementia-cgrmfyg--IoVBy69UDeuI/>
- Read more about symptoms of dementia:  
<https://dementiahelp.ca/understanding-dementia/resources-factsheets/>
- Listen to this webinar on understanding behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ys55HhyrWZo&list=PLqiA3A3X-xLlqa8QwqUFCxgLTLrhLG53>

Ottawa: 613-523-4004 Renfrew-County: 1-888-411-2067 | [info@dsorc.org](mailto:info@dsorc.org) | [DementiaHelp.ca](http://DementiaHelp.ca)

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