

# Recognizing Early Warning Signs of Responsive Behaviors in Persons with Dementia

*Eilon Caspi Ph.D.*

*“Intervention strategies are typically more effective the earlier in the escalation cycle they are applied.”*

(Slone & Gleason, 1999)

*“If emotions are ignored, they fester and can lead to violent behavior.”* (Raia, 1999)

Research among residents with dementia has demonstrated that **the majority of aggressive behaviors are preceded by an observable antecedent event.**

(Ryden et al.1991; Bridget-Parlet et al. 1994; Caspi, in press)

*“Anxiety is often the first observable level of agitation.”*

(Eller, Griffin, & Mote, 2003)

*“Caregivers must identify and treat anxiety before it channels the person’s energy into defensive behaviors.”*

(Hurley, Volicer, & Mahoney, 2005)

*“Anxiety is a feeling of distress, subjectively experienced as fear or worry, and objectively expressed through autonomic and central nervous system responses. Anxiety is always a response to a real or perceived threat.”*

(Mahoney, Volicer, & Hurley, 2000)

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Observable Early Warning Signs</b>
<b>Physiological Signs of Anxiety</b>	Abnormally rapid heart rate; rapid, noisy, irregular or difficulty breathing; hyperventilation; feeling hot; dizzy or lightheaded; sweating (not due to heat); trembling; shakiness; increased muscle tension; dry mouth; higher urinary frequency; numbness or tingling; indigestion or discomfort in abdomen; faint; unsteady; face flushes.
<b>Tense Body Language</b>	Extremities show tension; clenched fist, or knees pulled up tightly; strained, inflexible body position; hunched shoulders.
<b>General Signs of Anxiety</b>	Irritability; nervous; fidgeting; unable to relax; restless motion; inability to sit still; acts squirming or jittery; leg jiggling; wobbliness in legs; repeated or agitated movement or motions; asking repeated questions; rapid, disconnected speech; voice changes; anxiety about upcoming events; poor attention span; pacing; shadowing the caregiver; appearance of trying to get away from hurt area; withdrawing from other without anger.
<b>Facial Expressions Signaling Anxiety</b>	Grimacing; line between eyebrows; lines across forehead; eyes wide; tight facial muscles; poor eye contact; wariness; sigh.  Frowning: face looks strained; stern or scowling looks; displeased expression with a wrinkled brow and creases in the forehead; corners of mouth turned down.
<b>Hands Signals of Anxiety</b>	Hand wringing; forceful touching, tugging, or rubbing of body parts; tremor.
<b>Signs of Anger</b>	Drawing eyebrows together; furrowed brow (with other anger signs); clenching teeth; pursing lips (downward curve); narrowing eyes; making distancing gesture; lower jaw out.
<b>Frightened Facial Expression</b>	Terrified, scared, concerned looking face; looking bothered, fearful, or troubled; alarmed appearance with open eyes and pleading face; tearfulness; crying.

The sources for the content presented in the table include:

Mahoney, Volicer, & Hurley, (2000) – Clinical Indicators of Anxiety.

Beck et al. (1988) – Beck Anxiety Inventory.

Lawton, Van Haitsma, & Klapper, (1999), Lawton & Rubinstein, (2000) – Observed Emotion Rating Scale.

Hurley et al., (1992) – Discomfort Scale in Dementia of the Alzheimer's Type.