Behavior Issues
Managing Behavior
Non-Pharmacologic Approaches

Donna Munic-Miller, PhD
Cleveland Clinic
Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health
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Presenter Disclosures

Donna Munic-Miller, Ph.D.

The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

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Behavior Issues

• Behavior issues can surface early in HD and continue as the disease progresses
• Behavior issues can be distressing to an individual, family, and friends
• Behavior interventions can be useful
• Medications can be helpful, especially when certain behaviors present a danger
Common Behavior Issues in HD

Aggression
Anxiety
Apathy
Depression
Impulsive behavior and poor judgment
Irritability and emotional outbursts
Obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviors
Unawareness
Causes of Behavior Issues

- A behavior may occur for different reasons
- Behavior issues may be due to physical, emotional, social, environmental, or task-related causes
Physical Causes of Behavior Issues

- Medical conditions
- Medications
- Changes in the brain
- Visual impairments
- Hearing impairments
Physical Causes of Behavior Issues

- Dehydration
- Hunger
- Constipation
- Pain
- Physical discomfort
- Fatigue and sleep problems
Emotional Causes of Behavior Issues

- Depression
- Fear and anxiety
- Frustration
- Confusion
Social Causes of Behavior Issues

Social interactions
family, friends, colleagues, and others

Social Settings
large groups, unfamiliar social gathering
Environmental Causes of Behavior Issues

- Noise
- Over-stimulation
- Lack of activity (boredom)
- Unstructured environment
- Lack of routine
- Change in routine
- Financial stress
Task-related Causes of Behavior Issues

- Task complicated
- Task has many steps
- Task physically difficult
- Task unfamiliar
What Can A Care Partner Do?
Behavioral Intervention Options

- Change the antecedents – what causes the behavior (triggers)
- Change the consequences – what happens as a result of the behavior (reactions)
Intervene or Not Intervene

• Is a behavior a risk to health or safety?
• Will an intervention help a person feel comfortable, respected, and cared about?
• Is a behavior intervention worth the time, energy, or possibility of further upsetting a person?
Assess the Situation

• What is the behavior?
• When does the behavior occur?
• Where does the behavior occur?
• Who is there?
• What follows after?
Before Implementing Any Behavioral Intervention

- Review possible causes
- Rule out medical conditions
- Be aware of any medication side effects
- Identify any sensory impairments
- Set realistic goals
- Be prepared to make adjustments
Behavioral Intervention Strategies

- Plan ahead
- Promote a safer environment
- Minimize stress and novelty
- Decrease noise and distraction
- Establish routines
- Provide activity
Behavior Intervention Strategies

• Slow down
• Simplify
• Redirect and distract
• Ignoring
• Prompting and cues
• Modeling
More Behavioral Intervention Strategies

- Increase positive interactions and positive attention
- Be aware of your nonverbal behavior
- Respond to feelings
- Reassure
- Maintain calm within yourself
- Get help from others
Strategies to Avoid

• Arguing
• Threatening
• Blaming
• Shaming
• Demanding that someone stop
Strategies to Avoid

- Screaming to increase understanding
- Showing you are afraid
- Trying to grab or corner a person
- Personalizing the individual’s behavior
General Considerations

- Behavior interventions require consistency, effort, and patience
- Be creative (think outside the box)
- Be flexible
- May need to use combination of strategies
- Effectiveness of intervention may vary
- Keep learning and sharing
References and Resources

- Huntington’s Disease: A Family Guide. Huntington’s Disease of America
- Huntington’s Disease: Hope Through Research. National Institute of Neurological disorders and Stroke
- www.hdsa.org