

Safe Patient Interaction

Caregivers often must interact with patients who are—or can get—agitated, confused or combative. Taking time to assess a patient's behavior before each interaction can help you defuse situations and avoid injury to them and yourself.

Before Interacting with a Patient

- Read the patient's chart and speak with co-workers. This can help you identify patients who have a history of combative behavior.
- Always assume the situation has the potential to become dangerous.
- Dress for safety and success (see callout at right).

Safely Interacting with a Patient

- Maintain an initial safe distance of approximately 3 to 4 feet. This will enable you to keep the patient in full view while avoiding potential grabs, kicks or punches.
- Establish eye contact with the patient and pay attention to facial expressions, especially if the patient is non-verbal or there are language issues.
- Look for signs of agitation, such as clinched fists, a flush face, or loud or confusing speech. Also watch for possible impairment from medications or alcohol.
- Move slowly around the patient and try to keep yourself in view of the patient. If you go outside of their view, explain to them what you are doing and why so they remain comfortable with your movements.
- Talk in a clear and calming voice, even if the patient raises their voice.
- Pay attention to the patient's words and actions. Some patients may attempt to pull at your clothes or grab at your arms or legs to get your attention if they feel their needs are not being met. If this behavior is not addressed, the situation could escalate to a more physical or verbal one.



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Dressing for Success

- Wear **non-slip footwear** that protects your heels and toes and allows for ease of movement.
- **Secure longer hair** reduce the risk of hair pulls.
- **Limit jewelry and loose items.**
- Only wear lanyards, ID badges, or clothing cords with a **breakaway cord.**

Remember:

- **Immediately report** all details of aggressive verbal or physical patient behavior to your manager.
- **Update** medical records to warn other caregivers of past aggressive behaviors.
- **Follow** your company policy for discontinuing patient care if the patient's behavior becomes unsafe.

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