

How To Adjust Your Expectations to Their Reality

When the next challenging behavior happens, 4 steps to follow:

1. Ask 1-2 simple questions to determine what answer would make the most sense to them in their current reality - for example, if they “Want to go home”, don’t assume they’ll understand that they aren’t home, and instead, ask about why they want to go home or what they need from home.
2. See if there is an unmet need you can satisfy, and if not, assure them that you understand and that their concern is valid or normal.
3. Give them the answer that will make sense in their view of reality and will bring them the most peace in that moment.
4. As you proceed, use their reality as your guide on how much you should or shouldn't tell them in that moment.

Example #1: Refusal to shower

Bob is refusing to take a shower and is saying that he doesn’t need one.

Let's go through the 4 step process...

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1. Asking only 1 or 2 questions, try to get a sense of his reality -
“When did you last shower?” and if he knows it’s been at least a few days, ask him “Why don’t you want to shower?”
2. Assure him that you understand and that his concern is normal.
“Oh, I didn’t realize you showered recently!” (even if you know its been over a week), or “Thanks for telling me about [his reason for not wanting to shower] - I agree, no one would want to deal with that!”
3. If you know someone or something that is important to them, make that task a stepping stone to getting what they want. That way, you’re playing in their reality and they feel like they are making the decision:
 - *"Your granddaughter loves to see you looking your best. Why don't we clean ourselves off real quick so we can see her."*
 - *Or, "You know, I also had [their concern] and I wanted to try out [solution to their concern], but I wasn't sure how to do it, do you think you could help me real quick?"*
4. If they think they showered yesterday, don’t tell them things like “You stink, you haven’t showered for days” - it just won’t make sense from their perspective. Stick to their reality.

Example #2: "I Want to Go Home!"

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Barbara is insisting she has to go home in order to get to her small kids. What should you do?

Again, let's go through the 4 steps:

1. Asking some questions about how old she is and the age of her kids, we may discover that to Barbara, she isn't 94 like she is in your reality, she is 30. Also, her kids are 4 and 5 and not in their 70's in her reality. We want to embrace this reality, and use it to set our expectations on how to proceed.
2. Acknowledge the need: “Oh, you need to get to your kids! Yeah, it’s important to make sure they’re taken care of, is that what you want to do?”
3. Telling her something about the kids that make sense in her reality will give her peace again - “Oh, I think your husband is with the kids, he said to tell you.” (It doesn’t matter if he’s still alive since she thinks she is 30.)
4. You can pretty quickly see that she reacts badly when you try to minimize this or if you try to tell her she doesn't have kids. No 30 year old mom with young kids is going to be deterred by these sort of responses, so giving her an explanation that makes sense to her reality is what works for her in that moment.