

Understanding Causes of Behavior Problems Among Nursing Home Residents

A *behavior problem* is any behavior that is harmful physically or emotionally. It can be harmful to the person doing it or to someone else.

Examples of problem behaviors include a depressed resident's withdrawal from other people, an agitated resident shouting repeatedly, an agitated resident hitting someone, and a confused resident wandering from his or her unit.

Causes of behavior problems include internal and external factors that combine to make a behavior happen or keep happening (i.e., trigger or reinforce a behavior).

Sample internal triggers or reinforcers

Emotion (e.g., despair, anxiety, fear)
Medication
Illness (physical or mental)
Confusion
Pain or discomfort
Lifelong perceptions
Being misunderstood by others

Sample external triggers or reinforcers

Lack of meaningful activity
Unpleasant events
Unpleasant actions of others
Demands of others
Light that is too bright or too dim
Too much noise

Remember: Every problem behavior is likely to have *both* internal and external causes.

