



Chapter 12

Challenging behaviour – who challenges who?

Peter Cronin

What does challenging behaviour mean?

Challenging behaviour means different things to different people. For example, what you think is challenging I might think is normal. Challenging behaviour can be someone shouting or someone being aggressive. But, you have to remember there is a reason for challenging behaviour. You need to think about how people have been treated in the past as this might cause challenging behaviour.

Why do you think challenging behaviour happens?

There are lots of reasons. A lot of the time it's because people have nothing to do – they're bored. Also, it can be a communication problem, especially with people with severe learning disabilities as they can't get their point of view across. They might not understand what staff are saying and they might get angry. They might not be able to tell staff what they want, even something simple like wanting a drink. Sometimes people get angry because of the staff. Staff can be challenging as well. They might tell you off or be too bossy. Staff need to have the right attitude and remember that they can get it wrong sometimes.

Do you have any examples of how staff behaviour can be challenging?

One time I came downstairs in the morning in my dressing gown and there was a stranger in the kitchen. I was shocked and frightened. It turned out she was a member of agency staff but no one had told us she was coming. That was challenging.

Sometimes the staff change the TV channel without asking and then wonder why I get upset. It's my house, not theirs. We have a house diary and sometimes they forget to write my appointments in and I miss important meetings. But, most of the time, they are kind and helpful – I don't want you to get the wrong idea!

What can help?

Staff need to be patient. They need to find out ways to communicate with people with learning disabilities. They need to find out what people want and help them get it. It's about respect as well; we need to be respected and people need to know that we have the same rights as everyone else. There's too much discrimination against people with learning disabilities.

People need things to do and not just sit in front of the TV all day. If someone can do a job then staff need to help them to find a job. Other people might want to go to a day centre or to classes. If you have things to do then you won't have challenging behaviour.

What should staff do when challenging behaviour happens?

They shouldn't panic. They should be calm and make sure everyone is safe. They could talk to the person gently and try and find out what's wrong. You could do relaxation exercises like taking deep breaths or going for a walk so they can calm down. Staff shouldn't be in the person's face – you need to give people space.