Tips for Dealing with Combative Patients

There are many reasons that those we provide care to may be combative: mental or physical diagnosis, past experiences, recent experiences, and beliefs. Regardless of the reason for the aggression, there are some things that we can do to protect ourselves while still providing the care they need.

How to Avoid Triggering Aggressive Behavior

- Never turn your back on a patient or resident
- Avoid comments that could potentially embarrass the person. Ask onlookers to leave
- Avoid distractions – use quiet places
- Listen and allow the person to vent or release verbally
- Offer choices

How to Avoid Non-Verbal Triggers

- Limit over-activity
- Avoid exaggerated gestures with hands or arms
- Honor the person's space and don’t trap, corner or stand over them
- Avoid showing your own fear

How to Use Speech to De-escalate

- Use simple and positive statements
- Tell the person what is going to happen
- Give instructions one at a time
- Maintain normal volume and rhythm
- Be reassuring and don’t use threats
- Ask how you can help them

Responses When the Person You need to Transfer is Combative or Exhibiting Aggressive Behaviors

- Keep out of harms way – i.e. stay at least an arm’s length from the person
- Stay calm (see earlier suggestions)
- Let the person know that you will come back at a set time (establish the time) to accomplish the needed task
  - Provide an option
- Keep in mind that, unless it is a life-threatening situation, the care can wait – just don’t forget to come back.