

What to Say to Respond to Delusions

What Doesn't Work:

1. Showing evidence
2. Using logic
3. Using reason
4. Yelling/getting upset
5. Trying to defend yourself

What to say instead:

1. Keep your voice calm
2. Repeat back what they are saying
3. Give an excuse that makes sense to them
4. or Give them space to calm down
5. Offer your help
6. Or engage them in something else once they are calm

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1. DELUSION EXAMPLE: STEALING KEYS

Example: Mom is confusing the memory of you putting the car keys down a few days ago with her hiding the keys in the freezer earlier today so you couldn't stop her from driving.

Now she believes that you stole her care keys.

Here is an example of how this typically goes: (DP=Dementia Patient & C=Caregiver)

DP: Why did you move my car keys

C: I didn't move your car keys you did

DP: I had them right there and I saw you pick them up and move them

C: I just watched you pick them up and move them

DP: YOU PUT THEM IN THE REFRIGERATOR I SAW YOU!!! Look, I'm tired of you lying to me why can't you just be honest

C: You're the one that's lying, not me!!

DP: I saw you do it quit lying, just admit it!!

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Here is an example of how you can respond instead:

DP: Why did you move my car car keys?

C: Ok, you're thinking I took your car keys.

DP: I know you did, they were there I saw you move them!

C: Ok, let me get this straight, the keys were in your normal spot and now they're not?

DP: Yes because you moved them, I saw you, why did you move them??

C: You know, sometimes I forget where I move things

DP: Why do you move my stuff when I need them?

C: I don't sometimes my memory gets weird sometimes you know
Can you remind me why do you need your keys?

DP: I need to go to the

DP: You need to work on that honey.

C: I know, you're right I do. In the meantime, could you help me find the keys? You're good at looking for stuff and I would appreciate the help

DP: Ok, fine, let's go.

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WHY THE 1ST DIDN'T WORK & THE 2ND WORKS BETTER

Ok, so let's break down these 2 examples:

In the first example the caregiver is:

1. Trying to defend themselves
2. Trying reason with them and use logic
3. Even throwing in their own accusations at their loved one

While these have worked for them before dementia or has worked with anyone else you have ever talked to with a normal brain, it simply doesn't work with a diseased brain

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In the second example, why it worked was:

1. The caregiver kept a calm voice throughout
2. The caregiver repeated back details the person with dementia gave them to understand their reality better
3. They gave an excuse that made sense with the reality they just learned about

In this case, in Mom's reality, you took her keys. She made it clear there was no other alternatives in her reality.

Instead of resisting her reality in an effort to "be right" or "prove your innocence", you went with it and gave an excuse that would make sense to her (forgetting where you put them or struggling with remembering things)

This turned you from her enemy to her ally who simply made a mistake.

As a caregiver, your mental energy and time is precious. Choosing the response that will shorten the amount of time and energy you put towards delusions is the difference between handling everything ok and drowning.

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#2 EXAMPLE: CHEATING

Example: Barbara has been married to her husband Bob for 20 years.

Barbara and Bob went to a gallery together. Bob saw Barbara smile & say hello to a family friend H=Husband W=Wife

H: I saw you flirting with John at the gathering. I know you're cheating on me

W: No I wasn't and I'm not cheating on you

H: Stop lying to me I saw you!

W: You didn't see anything, look I can prove it to you

H: You don't have anything because you're a dirty liar!

W: I'm not lying, look I even have a picture of us at the party, John wasn't even there

H: Stop lying, how could you do this to us? After everything I've done for you, after 30 years!!!

W: John wasn't even THERE!!!

H: You're a lying cheating WHORE!!!

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In the first example the caregiver is:

1. Trying to defend themselves
2. Trying to use evidence
3. Trying to use logic

Trust me I get it, emotionally this would wreck anyone. That is why it is so important to make the interaction short or tap someone else in if you can so you can protect yourself.

As a warning, even when you diffuse it, chances are it will keep popping up.

This is likely based on the fear of losing you, of not being enough as they lose abilities. This is about them and not you.

They aren't doing this because you aren't showing them enough evidence or not doing enough.

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Here is a way to respond that minimizes the hurt for both of you:

H: I saw you flirting with John at the gathering. I know you're cheating on me

W: You saw me flirting with John at the gathering?

H: Yes I did, why are you cheating on me?

W: Look Bob, before we say anything else, I want to tell you that I love you, I'm not leaving you and I care about you, ok?

H: Then why are you cheating on me?

W: Alright, I can see why you're upset and I don't think I'll make it better.

How about you talk this over with your brother or I give you some alone time for an hour and we'll then we'll figure this out

H: Ok, fine, give me the phone I'll call Richard, get out

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This works better for a few reasons:

1. You keep a calm voice
2. You respond to his emotions and not the accusation by reassuring him
3. You offer for him to vent to someone else or calm down on his own while giving him a time frame of when you'll be back to resolve this issue

You do this knowing you aren't going to convince him that you aren't cheating so trying to is pointless.

Also, it is ok to protect yourself by having boundaries on that emotionally triggering of a subject for you.