

Attention seeking

"She's just attention seeking!"

You may have said this yourself or heard other frustrated staff make this comment.

Complaints about attention seeking behaviour are common in aged care settings. It is stressful for staff whose time and energy is limited to repeatedly respond to questions, requests, or other behaviour that is intended to get their attention.

It may be repeated bell ringing, calling out from a room, physical complaints, and emotional behaviour such as tearfulness or anxious insecurity.

Why does it happen and what can we do about it?

Needing attention is normal for human beings. We are social animals who require interaction with others. Some people have a high need for interaction with others and may be drawn to social settings such as the lounge room. Other people may have a low need for attention from others and find the lounge room overpowering and feel more comfortable in their own room or in a quieter environment.

We may also need attention to feel good about ourselves, i.e. 'I am OK if someone is paying me some attention, but as soon as I am on my own I feel unhappy and/or unpleasant memories come to mind.'

If a resident asks for your attention repeatedly let them know in a respectful manner: 'Every half hour, I will come in and see that you are OK, have water and are warm/cool and I will be back at the time I said, but I won't answer any requests at this time. I will be back to do that at the time I said.' This must be said warmly and firmly.

Eventually (after several weeks usually) the person will adjust to the half hourly visits and refrain from more frequent requests. It requires *consistency and persistence* from all staff to make this strategy work.

A second strategy is to reward or reinforce behaviour that is not attention seeking. If the behaviour you want more of is quiet sitting or socially appropriate interaction, this is the behaviour that gets your attention – not the repeated requests to which you would give minimal attention or apply the planned limits.

Try to achieve a balance of your needs and theirs. They have a right to attention as a human being. It is up to us to provide it in the best way possible in the time available.