

Why Reassurance Stops Working in Dementia

What the brain can no longer do

What caregivers notice

Reassurance stops helping. Explaining, calming, reminding or promising safety no longer settles distress. The same questions repeat, and anxiety escalates instead of easing.

This often happens even when reassurance used to work well, leaving caregivers confused and exhausted.

What reassurance asks the brain to do

Reassurance requires the brain to:

- take in language
- hold information briefly
- compare it to what feels wrong
- trust the explanation enough to let go of distress

Dementia gradually disrupts these systems. Even when language sounds intact, the brain may no longer be able to *use* information to regulate emotion.

Reassurance is heard, but it cannot be held or applied.

Why saying it again doesn't help

When reassurance is repeated, the brain may register urgency or inconsistency rather than comfort.

From the brain's perspective, if reassurance keeps coming, the threat must still be present. What looks like "not listening" is often the brain being unable to complete the loop that would allow reassurance to settle.

A different way to understand what's happening

This is not stubbornness or refusal.

It is not a caregiver failure.

Reassurance stops working when the brain can no longer use information to calm itself. In those moments, regulation depends more on environment, tone, pacing, and physical cues than on words.

Understanding this shift helps caregivers stop escalating reassurance and start responding to what the brain can still manage.

*Understanding how dementia changes the brain series, adapted from **Becoming a Brain Interpreter***

This resource supports understanding and communication and does not replace clinical judgment