Hidden Causes of Behavior Crises

- Pain
- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Hearing, balance or vision loss

Pain

- Pain is always a difficult experience, but it can be especially difficult for people with developmental disabilities.
- Pain can lead to behavioral crises. It is important for caregivers to be aware of and seek treatment for conditions that cause pain.
Many people with developmental disabilities cannot use words to tell us about pain. They show us with nonverbal or disruptive behaviors. What have you seen?

Headaches are a pain in the head, scalp, or neck caused by various reasons including diet, dehydration, sinus problems, stress/tension, and medications. Many of these causes are not serious. Headaches can also be due to serious causes including tumors, brain infections, strokes, and brain aneurysms.

Behaviors seen with Headaches
- Agitation, aggressive behavior
- Rocking, restlessness
- Holding head, head banging
- Furrowed brow, grimace, squinting eyes
- Avoiding bright lights and loud noises
- Verbalization of pain in head or neck

Rest in a quiet dark room
- Provide water, juice, or a beverage for good hydration
- Rest a cool or warm wash cloth on the head or neck
- Give Aspirin, Ibuprofen, or Tylenol (recommended with GERD or stomach ulcers)
- Notify a doctor if the headache occurs with a fever, neck stiffness and nausea, or if it occurs with a head injury, as with a fall.
Sinusitis

Sinusitis is a sinus inflammation that occurs when the sinuses fill with mucus. It can become infected by bacteria or germs. This can be caused by allergies, cystic fibrosis, smoking, and poor immune function.

**Signs**
- Areas over sinuses are tender to touch
- Bad breath
- Decreased ability to smell
- Cough
- Fatigue
- Nasal congestion and discharge
- Headache
- Hands or fingers in mouth
- Agitation, head banging

**Treatment**
- Place a warm moist cloth on sinuses several times a day
- Drink plenty of fluids to thin mucus
- Inhale steam from a shower
- Use a humidifier
- Nasal saline spray or Neti pot
- Tylenol or ibuprofen for pain
- If it lasts a long time contact a doctor, it may need antibiotics or antihistamines for allergies.

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Ear Problems

**Behavior**
- Head banging
- Hitting or pressing on ear
- Aggression
- Crying
- Sleep problems
- Changed response to noise
- Loss of balance
Ear Problems

Causes
- Inner ear infection
- Outer ear infection
- Wax build up
- Fluid pressure

Treatment
- Assessment by MD
- Medications

Oral Disease

- Oral health problems
  - Cavities, broken teeth, inflammation of gums, teeth, and teeth sockets, thrush
- Symptoms include
  - Swelling
  - Bleeding, swollen, or bright red or purple gums
  - Mouth sores
  - White coating on the tongue and inside of the mouth
- Behaviors include
  - Hands or fingers in the mouth
  - Increased activity and restlessness
  - Head banging
  - Refusing food, trouble chewing
  - Sleep changes

Treating and Preventing Oral Disease

- Practice good oral hygiene including brushing, flossing, and using a mouth wash
- Control diabetes through the proper use of medications, exercise, and diet
- Reduce the amount of foods and drinks high in simple sugars
- Make regular appointments with a dentist
- Chew sugar-free gum

Sore Throat

- A sore throat can be caused by various problems including the flu, GERD, strep throat, allergies, and tonsillitis.
- A sore throat usually involves an inflamed raw throat, scratchiness and irritation.
Sore Throat: Allergies

- **Allergies**
  - Congestion, runny nose
  - Watery eyes, itchy eyes
  - Coughing, sneezing
  - Itchy inside nose, throat, ears
- **Behaviors seen**
  - Scratching, decreased eating, swallowing frequently, agitation
- **Treatment**
  - Fluids, soothing drinks (tea), medications (Claritin, Benadryl, Zyrtec, throat lozenges).

Sore Throat: Strep

- **Signs and symptoms**
  - Fever
  - Swollen lymph nodes
  - Headache
  - White/yellow spots on tonsils or throat
  - Behavior changes
- **Prevention**
  - Good hand hygiene, cover sneezes and coughs
- **Treatment**
  - Make appointment with a doctor.

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disorder = GERD

- Occurs when stomach contents including food, fluid, and acid leak from the stomach back into the throat, irritating the esophagus and causing heartburn.
- GERD can be caused by certain foods, medications, obesity, and positioning after eating.

**Signs of GERD**

- Burning in the throat and chest that is increased by lying down or bending over
- Regurgitation and difficulty swallowing
- Coughing, wheezing, hoarseness, or a sore throat
- Recurrent pneumonia
- Dental erosion
- Nausea
- Losing weight

**Signs and Symptoms of GERD**
**Signs and Symptoms of GERD**

**Behaviors with GERD**
- A change in diet
- Refusing food
- Eating less
- Having difficulty breathing
- Sleeping less
- Placing fingers or hands in the mouth
- Agitation

**GERD Treatment**
- Ways to relieve and prevent GERD include
  - Diet changes—
    - Eat smaller meals and eat slower
    - Avoid certain foods like peppermint, citrus, tomatoes, fatty foods, spicy foods, and caffeine

**Urinary Tract Infection**
- An infection that can include the kidneys, ureters, bladder or urethra.
  - Urination Symptoms
    - Increased frequency
    - Increased urgency
    - Changes in urination patterns
    - Difficulty in going
Symptoms
- Changes in behavior or awareness
- Fever
- Burning or pain with urination
- Cloudy, foul smelling or blood-tinged urine

Treatment
- Good perineal hygiene
- Drink enough fluids
- Physician’s order for antibiotics or other treatments

Constipation
- Constipation occurs when bowel movements become less frequent or difficult to pass. If no bowel movement occurs in two days check consumer’s bowel protocol for how to treat.
- Although constipation is a common problem, it can have very serious side effects.

  Signs
  - Straining with a bowel movement,
  - Less frequent bowel movements
  - Abdominal pain
  - Distended stomach
  - Decreased appetite
  - Nausea, vomiting
  - Fecal odor on breath
  - Changes in behavior

Treating Constipation
- Increased physical activity
- Increased fluids and fiber in the diet
- Change toileting schedule to increase frequency, ease, and good positioning
- Hot drinks
- Use a small step stool in front of the toilet to raise legs

Teach deep breathing while on the toilet
Follow constipation protocol/plan in giving correct medications: stool softeners, laxatives, and suppositories or enemas
Contact a physician for constipation lasting longer than five days.
Hemorrhoids

Inflamed swollen veins in the rectum and anus

May cause pain, itching, bleeding

Risk factors
- Obesity
- Aging
- Diarrhea
- Constipation

Signs
- Anal picking
- Agitation
- Red blood with stool

Treatment
- Ointment
- Medicated wipes
- Soaking
- Wet wipes after BM
- Meds for pain
- Banding
- Surgical removal

Stomach Ulcers

A peptic ulcer is the inflammation and erosion of the stomach or the duodenum

It can be caused by bacteria (H pylori), alcohol, Ibuprofen, Aspirin, Naproxen, and tobacco

Symptoms
- Nausea and vomiting
- Pain with eating
- Clutching and rubbing stomach
- Changes in eating: refusing to eat, drinking less, eating more often
- Chest pain
- Fatigue and weight loss
- Bloody or tarry stools
- Agitation
Stomach Ulcer Treatment

- **Treatment**
  - Medications
    - Antibiotics for H. Pylori
    - Omeprazole (Prilosec)
    - Famotidine (Pepcid)
  - Seek medical attention if there is a sudden sharp pain, rigid/hard abdomen, symptoms of shock, bloody vomit, or dark tarry stool

Arthritis

- Arthritis occurs with the breakdown of cartilage between bones at the joint causing inflammation, pain, wearing, and rubbing.
- Arthritis can be caused by infection, wear and tear and previous injury to the area.

Osteoporosis

- Osteoporosis is the thinning and loss of bone density

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refusal to do usual activities</td>
<td>Heat/ice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping more</td>
<td>Splints</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weight gain</td>
<td>Massage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walking with a limp</td>
<td>Assistive devices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stiffness and limited range of motion</td>
<td>Maintain healthy weight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavior challenges</td>
<td>Exercise to decrease pain and stiffness and increase muscle and bone strength</td>
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<td>Over the counter pain meds (NSAIDs)*</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal Joint</th>
<th>Osteoarthritis</th>
<th>Degenerative Arthritis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bone</td>
<td>Cartilage</td>
<td>Synovial fluid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Synovial membrane</td>
<td>Joint space</td>
<td>Bone density</td>
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Signs and Symptoms

- Bone pain, back and neck pain with fractures
- Fractures with little trauma,
- Loss of height, stooped posture

Behaviors

- Decreased activities, hesitant to do activities
- Immobility
- Guarding limbs, rubbing/holding limbs
- Increased weight
- Increased time sleeping
**Osteoporosis Treatment**
- **Diet**
  - Adequate Vitamin D and Calcium
- **Exercise**
  - Don’t overdo it
  - Weight bearing/balance exercises
- **Prevent falls**
  - Assistive gait devices – walkers, gait belts
  - Home safety assessment: grab bars, railings as needed
  - Well fitting shoes
  - Stand by assist while ambulating
- **Medication**
  - Prescribed meds for osteoporosis such as alendronate
  - Pain medications as prescribed

**Edema**
- Edema is swelling of the body due to fluid trapped in tissue and is most common in the hands, feet, ankles, and legs
- Edema can be caused by heart failure, kidney disease, or liver disease among many other causes
- Signs:
  - Swelling
  - Pitting of skin, when pressed

**Symptoms**
- Reluctance to do usual activities
- Increased weight
- Pain from the pressure
- Irritability or agitation

**Treatment**
- Compression stockings
- Elevating limbs
- Medications prescribed by doctors, such as a diuretic (water pill)

**Pressure Ulcers**
- Pressure ulcers can occur due to rubbing or pressure that slows circulation of blood to the area, which can cause the tissue to die.
- Look at the ankles, ears, elbows, hips, heels, back, sacrum, and buttocks; pressure ulcers commonly occur here
- If a reddened area is found, determine the cause of the pressure
Treating Pressure Ulcers
- Relieve pressure by turning and by using pillows and cushions
- Use padded foot and armrests
- Provide good hydration and nutrition
- Assessment and treatment per physician’s orders for open wounds

Painful Sores and Rashes
- Sores or rashes can occur due to infection from bug bites, heat, allergies, poor hygiene, and disease processes.
- Skin breakdown in the groin area from incontinence is common.
- Watch for:
  - Scratching
  - Restlessness
  - Sleep changes
  - Refusing to sit or lie down
  - Heat/fever/redness

Treating Ulcers, Sores and Rashes
- Maintain clean, dry skin and provide good hygiene
- Check skin in commonly affected areas daily
- Notify doctor and follow orders for cares and prescribed medications as needed.

Spasms and Cramping
- Spasms and cramping are painful muscle contractions.
- These contractions are sudden and uncontrollable.
  - Possible Causes
    - Imbalance of minerals and nutrients
    - Poor circulation
    - Fatigue
    - Menstruation
    - Quadriplegia
    - Cerebral palsy
Symptoms:
- Less active
- Rubbing or holding affected area
- Restlessness
- Behavior changes

Treatment
- Massaging and stretching affected area
- Acetaminophen or NSAIDs for pain
- Apply heat to the area
- Proper hydration and nutrition
- Medication as ordered per physician

Confusion can vary in severity or type.
- Confusion on how to do things like get dressed or use a fork
- Confusion causing anxiety or fear, resulting in agitation
- Confusion on location, date or time
- Confusion lasting for a moment or all day

When confusion is ignored, it can lead to behavior extremes and worsened medical conditions.

Causes
- Low blood sugar
- UTI
- High fever from infection or virus
- Dementia
- Physical challenges
- Dehydration
- Low blood pressure
- Anemia

What to do
- Check blood sugar of diabetic, treat as ordered
- Check temperature, follow up with medical treatment as needed.
- Look for signs of UTI as mentioned earlier
- Check blood pressure. If low, encourage fluids, follow up with clinic
What to do
- Appointment with doctor or NP
- Labs should be checked for possible anemia or Vitamin B12 deficiency
- Medications as needed with continued monitoring for less confusion over time

If confusion developed slowly and is variable, an assessment for dementia should be scheduled.
- The team of support and guardian/family can complete an NTG-Early Detection Screen for Dementia which includes information from a person’s best functioning time to the present.
- A day of dementia testing can be done at a geriatric clinic

Causes of Anxiety
- Confusion
- Low blood sugar
- Changed medication
- Dementia
- Hyperactive thyroid
- Shortness of breath
- Heart problems
- An anxious person will often show signs of agitation

What to Do
- Check blood sugar of diabetic, treat
- Address confusion and dementia as previously discussed
- If urgent breathing problems or chest pain, call 911
- Medical appointment and labs as needed to assess for heart, lung and thyroid problems

Loss of vision signs
- Bumping into walls
- Reaching and touching objects
- Ignoring others
- Startling and hitting out when someone touches her
- Refusing to move from chair or bed

Make appointment as needed.
- Foreshadow exam
- Consider calming medication as PRN for appointment
**Signs of balance problems**
- Falls
- Grabbing on to walls or furniture
- Refusal to walk or leave bed or chair
- Agitation and yelling when asked to walk

**Check for low blood pressure**
- Ears, eyes and movement checked at clinic
- Neurologist or geriatrician appointment may be needed for further testing

**Signs of hearing loss**
- Not turning toward sound
- Not answering a question
- Yelling, hitting when startled by someone
- Fearful, unwilling to leave room or home
- Hitting or covering ears
- Hearing exam and ear exam
- May need PRN medication, foreshadowing

**Prevent a crisis**
- Be on the alert when a person has changed behavior
- Consider possible health challenges
- Check for signs of pain, confusion, anxiety, loss of vision, balance or hearing
- Reach out to health care providers if needed.