

When Behaviour Becomes a Language — and We Keep Responding Like It's Noise



In dementia care, we often say that behaviour is communication. It sounds compassionate. It sounds informed. But it is incomplete — and in that incompleteness, harm quietly persists.

Behaviour is not merely communication. It is a **language**. And like any language, when it is misunderstood, dismissed, or punished, the consequences are profound.

As cognitive decline progresses, spoken language is often the first system to fracture. Vocabulary thins. Syntax collapses. Words no longer arrive on demand. But the need to express pain, fear, protest, comfort, and identity does not disappear with speech. It simply **moves elsewhere** — into the body, into movement, into rhythm, into resistance.

What we label as “distress,” “agitation,” “challenging behaviour,” or “aggression” is very often a person speaking fluently in the *only language they still have*.

The tragedy is not that this language exists. The tragedy is that we continue to treat it as “noise”.

In care settings across the world, people living with dementia are routinely corrected, redirected, restrained, hurried, repositioned, medicated, or admonished for behaviours that are expressing something precise: pain during care, fear of touch, loss of control, sensory overload, or the violation of personal boundaries. The response is often procedural reassurance — “nearly done,” “you’re safe,” “there’s no need to be upset” — while the behaviour continues to escalate, not because the person is “confused,” but because they are **not being heard**.

When behaviour is reduced to a symptom to be managed, the person disappears behind the task.

This is where emotional harm compounds. Not only is the person in pain or distress, but they are also **disciplined for expressing it**. The behaviour is framed as something to correct rather than something to translate. In effect, the person is punished for speaking a language that no one around them has learned to understand.

And this is where the ripple begins.

Emotions do not stay contained within one body. In dementia care environments, emotion moves — from person to carer, from carer to team, from team to culture. When fear, frustration, or pain is ignored in one individual, it does not vanish. It spreads. It hardens into routines. It becomes normalised urgency. It turns care into something done *to* someone rather than *with* them.

What starts as one unheard moment becomes an entire system that no longer listens. This is not a failure of kindness. Many carers genuinely care. It is a failure of **understanding and interpretation**. We have built systems that are fluent in tasks but illiterate in understanding and speaking the language of behaviour.

Launex takes a different position. We do not teach families or carers to “manage behaviour.” We teach them to **read it**.

We treat behaviour as a patterned, consistent language shaped by neurological change, emotional memory, sensory experience, and loss of agency. Just as sign language is not “acting out with hands,” behavioural expression is not acting out with bodies. It is structured. It is meaningful. And it deserves translation, not correction.

When behaviour is recognised as language, the response shifts fundamentally. The question stops being “How do we stop this?” and becomes “What is being said here — and what has been missed?” Care slows down. Touch becomes negotiable again. Tasks become secondary to consent. Emotional safety returns before physical compliance is demanded.

Most importantly, the person re-emerges.

This is not about perfection. It is about **permission** — permission to pause, to reassess, to admit that the system may be moving faster than the person can tolerate. It is about replacing urgency with curiosity and control with interpretation.

When behaviour is finally understood as language, something remarkable happens: the need to shout fades. The body no longer has to fight to be heard. And the environment becomes quieter — not because the person has been subdued, but because they have been understood, heard and respected.

This is the work Launex stands for.

Not louder care. Not more interventions. But deeper listening — to the language that remains when words are gone.