

“Nothing has changed in our house... so why does it suddenly feel unsafe?”



This is something many families say, often just before behaviour begins to escalate. The furniture is the same. The layout is the same. The home hasn't changed. And yet, for someone living with dementia, the way the brain interprets that space *has*. What once felt familiar can slowly begin to feel confusing, unpredictable, or even threatening.

Families often describe moments like these: a loved one suddenly refusing to walk across a carpet, becoming frightened of the bathroom, insisting someone is in the house, or avoiding a room they've used comfortably for years. From the outside, this can look like confusion, stubbornness, or sudden anxiety. From the inside, it can feel as though the home no longer makes sense.

One of the hardest things for families to grasp is this: the environment itself hasn't changed, but the brain's ability to *read* it has. Patterns can look like holes. White fixtures can disappear. Mirrors can feel threatening. Shadows can feel real. When this happens, behaviour is not the problem — it is the signal that the brain no longer feels safe in the space it is trying to navigate.

At Launex, we see this moment again and again: families trying to manage behaviour without realising that the environment has become part of the challenge. When the brain struggles to interpret what it sees, distress often becomes the only way it can communicate. Small, thoughtful changes — such as adjusting lighting, increasing contrast, or simplifying visual spaces — can dramatically reduce anxiety, *when families understand why they are making those changes rather than guessing.*

Has your home ever suddenly felt “wrong” to the person you support, even though nothing had changed?

Or have you noticed fear or resistance in spaces that once felt safe? These are often early signs that the brain is struggling with perception, long before distress becomes the loudest form of communication.

Learning to recognise these moments sooner can make an enormous difference for both the person living with dementia and the family supporting them.

Learn more on dementia, the progression, overlaps, and the dementia brain that influences behaviours in our Dementia Care & Understanding course.

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