

When Behaviour Becomes the Brain's Last Reliable Signal



In dementia care, we often describe behaviour as communication. Sometimes it is seen as an expression of unmet needs, distress, fear, or confusion. These interpretations can be helpful, but they do not fully explain why behaviour becomes such a dominant form of expression as dementia progresses.

To understand that shift, we need to look at how the brain itself changes.

The brain does not decline evenly. Different systems lose accessibility at different speeds. The areas responsible for reasoning, language, planning, and impulse control — largely within frontal brain networks — are often among the first to weaken in many types of dementia. These systems normally help us pause, interpret situations, choose words, and regulate emotional reactions.

As those cognitive systems lose strength, other systems remain comparatively active.

Emotional memory networks, instinctive responses, and survival-based processing are far more resilient. These systems evolved to protect life long before complex reasoning developed, and they can operate without language.

When cognitive regulation weakens but emotional and survival systems remain accessible, the balance of influence inside the brain shifts.

The result is not simply “more behaviour.”

It is a **change in which systems are leading the response.**

Where a person once paused to think, they may now react emotionally. Where they once explained discomfort with words, their body may express it through resistance, withdrawal,

repetition, or agitation. Behaviour in these moments is not only communication — it is the brain using the systems that remain available.

From the perspective of the **Launex Dementia Brain Map™**, this shift reflects changing accessibility between cognitive, emotional, and survival systems. Cognitive processing becomes harder to reach, while emotional and instinctive responses remain easier to activate.

Understanding this neurological shift changes how we interpret behaviour.

Instead of asking, “Why are they acting like this?” we begin asking a different question: **“Which system is currently leading the response?”**

The behaviour itself is not the problem. It is the signal showing which part of the brain is currently carrying the weight of interpretation.

When we recognise this shift, behaviour becomes easier to understand and less likely to be mislabelled as defiance, aggression, or non-compliance. It becomes what it truly is — the brain adapting to neurological change by relying on the systems that remain accessible.

And when we learn to read that map, care becomes calmer, clearer, and far more humane.

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Educational graphic by LAUNEX LTD titled “When Behaviour Becomes the Brain’s Last Reliable Signal.” The image shows a human brain with arrows indicating reduced access to the cognitive system while emotional and survival systems remain active in dementia. The visual explains that behaviour can reflect which brain system is leading the response. © LAUNEX LTD 2026. All rights reserved.