

# Positive Approach™ to Brain Change

## GEMS of Dementia

**When given just the right care, people living with dementia can still shine.**

GEMS™ simplifies a complex process into a structured Positive Approach™ that compares different states of being and abilities to the characteristics of precious jewels. Understanding each stage leads to an adjustment of expectations and hands-on care.



### SAPPHIRES

My brain is “true blue”. I’m aging normally. When it’s hard to find words, I can describe what I’m thinking so you understand. I may talk to myself because I’m giving myself cues and prompts. I can learn new things and change habits, but it takes time and effort. **When possible, honoring my choices and preferences is important. I need more time to make decisions. Give me the details and let me think about it before you need an answer.** I’m able to remember plans and information but supports are helpful. **I may like specific prompts such as notes, calendars and reminder calls.** Health changes in vision, hearing, balance, coordination, depression, anxiety, pain, or medication may impact my behavior, but my cognitive abilities remain the same.

**Normal aging** | May feel blue about it  
**True to self** | Life-long preferences and patterns prevail  
**Slowing down** | Needs time to make decisions  
**Continued cognitive skills** | Benefits from reminders and prompts  
**Abilities affected by stress, fatigue, or pain** | Can bounce back  
**Can learn new things** | Takes time, effort, and practice  
**No dementia** | Healthy and non-stressed

### DIAMONDS



My brain is generally clear and sharp. I can be cutting, rigid and hard to deal with. I have many facets, so everyone sees me differently. This can cause conflict among my family or care team as it’s hard to tell if I’m just being stubborn or truly experiencing change in my abilities. I can socially chit-chat and have good cover skills. I want to keep habits and environments as they have always been, even if they seem problematic to you. I am often focused on finances or expenses and will resist most change including new expectations, routines, or environments. I can become accusatory - thinking others are trying to trick or conspire against me. **Short, brief visits will not expose my true struggles.** Even if you’re around all the time, you may not notice how much I’m changing because, instinctively, you fill in the gaps for me.

**Still clear and sharp** | Successful with established habits and routines  
**Becoming rigid** | Limited perspective, resists change, or won’t let things go  
**Respects authority** | Can be mean, demanding and paranoid over money  
**Becoming territorial** | Less aware of personal boundaries  
**Repeats self** | Tells same stories, asks same questions  
**Socially can cover mistakes** | People will experience them differently  
**New information difficult to hold onto** | May or may not be dementia-related



### EMERALDS

I have little awareness of my changing abilities. I want to take care of myself, but you’ll notice I’ll begin to neglect good eating habits and personal hygiene. I can chit-chat, but struggle with words and only understand about 3/4 of what you say. I know you’re unhappy with me by your tone of voice or expression. **If I’m lost in my life, accept the moment I’m in, listen and stay calm.** Because I’m easily frustrated, I often lose control of emotions and may blow up unexpectedly. When I feel afraid or confused, I’ll want to “go home”. I remember strong feelings but won’t remember details. My brain sometimes makes up information to fill in the blanks, which makes you think I am lying. If you argue, I may become resentful or suspicious of you. I’m not always rational and don’t want to be made to feel incompetent. If you’re going to help, I’d prefer the support of a friend than the care of a professional.

**Wants to ‘do’ for self** | Not noticing errors, or getting upset when unable to fix  
**Language vague** | Will struggle to communicate, asks what, where, when  
**Comprehension changing** | May be lost in time, going ‘back’ or off on ‘tangents’  
**Needs personal care prompts** | Doesn’t like being bossed, may react emotionally  
**On the go, but challenged when ‘way finding’** | Needs a ‘friendly guide’, daily structure  
**Loses important things** | May become afraid or think someone is taking them  
**Has dementia** | Fears being seen as incompetent, needs meaningful engagement

### AMBERS



I’m caught in time and focused on sensation. I know I like you based on how you look, sound, move, smell, and respond to me. It may surprise you to see how I comprehend the world around me. I’ll touch, smell, taste, take or take apart items, but it’s a function of how my brain processes now, and it soothes me. I like to do simple tasks over and over. My body is on auto-pilot and I often fall. I don’t recognize dangers in the home. **You may have to safeguard my environment.** I’m typically incontinent, may not feel hunger or thirst, and can’t express my needs. I’m intolerant to discomfort because my mouth, hands, feet and genitalia are highly sensitive due to changes in my nervous system. Therefore, activities like eating, taking medication, mouth care, bathing and toileting may distress me. **Please notice my cues and STOP if I’m resisting.** I can’t help my reactions and one or both of us may get hurt. **Wait a few minutes, connect with me, and try a different approach.**

**Focused on sensation** | What does it look, sound, feel, smell or taste like  
**Lives in a ‘moment of time’** | Not aware of the larger environment  
**No safety awareness** | Will explore space and touch or take things,  
**Communication limited** | Difficulty understanding and expressing needs  
**Private and quiet, or public and noisy** | No ability to delay needs or wants  
**Needs physical help completing tasks** | May resist verbally or react physically  
**Noticeable brain change** | Harder to connect with, may ‘exhaust’ caregivers  
**New information difficult to hold onto** | May or may not be dementia-related

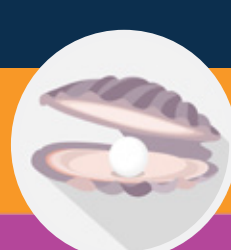


### RUBIES

My brain is in late-stage change. Transition is difficult for me. I like simple instructions and would rather you show me, one step at a time, instead of telling me what to do. My fine motor skills are very limited and **I’ll need assistance with utensils, zipping, buttoning, or brushing teeth.** I tend to hold, pinch, and manipulate items with my thumb rather than using my fingers. Because I can’t control the muscles in my mouth, I have difficulty swallowing. My vision has changed and I have no depth perception. I may misjudge distance, trip over large objects, or get stuck behind doors. I have gross motor reactions and will have either a desire to move or an intense fear of falling. Pulling or pushing me feels like you are trying to hurt me or make me fall. **Using Hand-under-Hand assistance helps me to feel safe and secure.** I still have automatic verbal and rhythmic response. **I enjoy music, your presence, and a willingness to be quiet with me.**

**Basic communication abilities** | Can ‘copy’ but unable to ‘understand’  
**Limited skill in mouth, eyes, fingers, feet** | Can imitate big movements  
**Transition difficult, slow to change gears** | Need help starting or stopping  
**Monocular vision** | Limited awareness, loss of depth perception  
**Can move forward only** | Not able to back up safely, falls prevalent  
**Responds to rhythmic interaction** | Sing, hum, pray, rock, sway and dance  
**Significant dementia** | Dependent on us to anticipate and meet needs for them  
**Has dementia** | Fears being seen as incompetent, needs meaningful engagement

### PEARLS



My brain is losing its ability to heal my body, and I’m near the end of my journey. I’m hidden like a pearl in an oyster shell, but will have moments when I become alert and responsive. **Use our time together not just to care for me, but also to comfort and connect with me. And please don’t talk about me as though I’m not still here.** I respond best to familiar voices and rhythmic, gentle movements. I’m ruled by reflexes and will startle easily. Because my brain is shutting down, be prepared to see me having difficulty swallowing and breathing. **At this stage, treating me with dignity is more important than treating any infection.** I may not be able to leave my body without permission from you. **Your greatest gift to me is to let me know that it’s alright to go.**

**Hidden in a shell** | Providers are the ‘bridge’ of connection to the world  
**Person is still there** | Moments of connection take time and will be short  
**Knows familiar and unfamiliar** | May cry or mumble when distressed  
**Unable to move by themselves** | Often in fetal position, still and quiet  
**Difficulty swallowing** | May or may not need to eat or drink  
**Brain failure will shut down body** | Important to ‘let go’ as they attempt to leave  
**Noticeable brain change** | Harder to connect with, may ‘exhaust’ caregivers  
**New information difficult to hold onto** | May or may not be dementia-related

