

”Then what are we allowed to do?”: Repetitive questions and behavior-regulating responses in the interaction with a demented person

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This article reports a study of a type of repetitive behavior, namely versions of the question “Then what are we allowed to do?” posed by one resident with dementia several times during an ordinary afternoon in the common room in a dementia care facility in interaction with care staff and visitors. The study is based on data consisting of field notes and video recordings of interactions taking place in the common room of a dementia ward in a Danish care facility collected over a period of nine months. We use ethnomethodological conversation analysis (EMCA) to investigate how the resident attempts to solve linguistic, cognitive and social challenges by initiating action with this type of question and how this initiative is responded to by care staff and visitors. We thereby point out how repetitive behavior is not necessarily only to be seen as a sign of illness which may require so-called behavior regulating responses from the surroundings but also as the resident’s use of remaining resources for accomplishing various actions in these contexts.