



## **Activities with Adult Dementia Clients**

### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

- Avoiding "Empty Day Syndrome" helps behavior, "Sundowning," wandering
- Select and modify activities according to client's ability level
- Give both visual and verbal instruction (model the activity; explain slowly)
- Tactile and muscular feedback work even better (manipulate client's limbs gently)
- Use immediately pleasurable activities
- Simplify or break activity into smaller components for success
- Use one-on-one interaction whenever possible
- Repeat well-liked activities often

### **ARTS & CRAFTS**

- Paint a Styrofoam ball – poster paint; 50" round; 6 sections; thick dowel holder
- Paste a theme collage: animals, babies, occupations, WWI, WWII, etc.
- Seasonal crafts: prepare in advance and simplify steps
- Paint or draw with watercolors or crayons (limit 2 or 3 colors)
- Simple shapes with plastic modeling clay (it's not messy)

### **REMINISCENCE**

- Reminiscence: the joy of memories; use visual prompts like photo albums
- Focus on easy recollections – use props like old clothes or knickknacks if necessary
- Organize or enjoy photo, stamp, coins albums together

### **PETS ARE CALMING**

- Live pets present some risks but give feeling of unconditional acceptance
- Bird watching
- Aquariums

### **MUSIC THERAPY**

- Dancing, rhythm band or clapping to music
- Sing-a-longs: old hymns, patriotic songs, old-time ditties
- Musical reminiscence: big band era, old war tunes
- Learn individual music preferences and bring tapes from library
- Music boxes, especially ones with figurines on top
- Exercise to music – simple aerobics; toss a ball or balloon



### **BOOKS OR MAGAZINES (Ideals, Country Living)**

- Read a short magazine story together – especially one with pictures
- Read poetry and bring appropriate picture client can look at
- Read a newspaper article
- Mention concrete events from this date 20, 30, 40 years ago

### **BALL GAMES (Engenders enthusiastic participation; promotes lengthier attention span)**

- Use soccer sized, soft ball
- Ball games with heavy-duty helium filled balloons work well
- Nerf ring toss, indoor bowling, or indoor golf

### **HOUSEWORK & YARD WORK**

- Set table, dust, sort or fold laundry, sweep floors, wash dishes
- Rake, plant, sweep walk, water lawn, weed, pick off dandelions
- Knead bread, top pizza, make fruit salad, stir things

### **PERSONAL ACTIVITIES**

- Do hair or fingernails, give a shave: set up a barber chair and use apron
- Offer to moisturize skin
- Take a walk: studies show ½ hour walk aid dementia patients in communication

### **STUFFED ANIMALS & DOLLS**

- Teddy bears – undressed are comforting
- Teddy bears – dressed are stimulating (use Velcro closures)
- Dolls – snapping, buttoning, zipping dolls' clothes are remembered activities

### **TACTILE THERAPY**

- Textured cloth & fur: nesting bags/last bag holds special treat: stimulate/satisfy
- Balls of yarn – winding decreases agitation and disruptive behavior

### **FLOWERS**

- Arrange flowers in an unbreakable vase
- Attach dry or artificial flowers or fabric to Styrofoam wreath
- Gardening therapy (indoor & outdoor)



### **CARDS & GAMES & ROLE PLAY**

- Coloring pictures
- Simplified Bingo; large piece jigsaw puzzles
- Matching cards or checkers by color or suit
- Old Maid or Go Fish with BIG cards
- Tossing games
- Bring funny hats for you and the client
- Bring clothing accessories: beware of safety problems

### **BUSY BOXES, BUSY APRONS, ACTIVITY CENTERS**

- Make boxes or aprons at home so they don't look like children's toys
- Include adult items: large ball bearing, latches, zippers, large nuts & bolts

### **PURSES & BRIEFCASES**

- Snapping kind works well and are interesting to hear
- Consider making purses into a busy box
- Clear plastic cosmetic container with items inside for women

### **MECHANICAL & INTERACTIVE TOYS**

- Mechanical toys – such as Transformers
- Interactive stimulus objects – like "Chatty Cathy"

### **JUNK MAIL**

- Use carefully: this can cause perplexity over money & finances  
Eddie Bauer or fishing catalogue for men; Hanover House or Lillian Vernon for women