

Failure Free Activities

The goal is to engage the person with dementia and encourage a sense of success.

General Guidelines

- **Create meaningful activities.** Try activities that the person used to do and enjoy, or that relate to past interests, or build upon existing skills.
- **Assess skills.** Can they sort objects by size or colour? Can they button shirts and zip up jackets? Can they follow written or verbal instructions? Modify activities to make them more or less challenging to fit the skills of the person.
- **Tailor activities to the person's ability level.** Try breaking tasks into smaller and more manageable components.
- **Keep activities simple.** Too many decisions or choices may frustrate people with dementia.
- **Give both verbal and visual instruction.** Feel free to tell and to show. If the person is accepting, even guide his or her arms gently as you instruct.
- **Do activities that let the person manipulate materials.** For people with advanced dementia, avoid small objects that might be swallowed and always ensure appropriate supervision.
- **Select the best time of day.** More energy in the morning? Go for a walk. More focused in the afternoon? Try an art project.
- **Keep the work area safe.** Work with unbreakable plastics. Keep the surface clean, uncluttered and well lit.
- **Be prepared with alternative activities.** If the person doesn't connect with an activity, have another ready. Through trial and error, you'll find activities that best suit the person.
- **Don't be afraid to try something new.** See if it arouses curiosity.
- **Repeat favourite activities, and establish a routine.** Note the activities the person enjoys. Although he or she may not remember them the next time, they may repeat the processes instinctively. While doing familiar activities, such as sorting objects, keep the procedures the same, but try different content from day to day to keep it fresh for the person and for you.

Possible Activities

Sorting

(by colour, shape, texture, material, etc.)

E.g. Sorting small, colourful pom-poms and placing them into the painted pots that match the colours.

Sorting a large container of brightly coloured, plastic shapes into piles. If this

is also a meaningful activity for the service it can bring a greater sense of accomplishment and success.

Sorting a stack of playing cards according to the designs on the cards.

Sorting using a scoop to pick up pieces can support motor control necessary for eating (but again supervise closely to ensure the person doesn't become confused and try to eat the objects).

Searching

e.g. fill a large plastic tub with unpopped popcorn kernels/dried peas/beads and mix in some coins/buttons, etc. Encourage the person to dig through the kernels to find the buttons.

Can be varied by asking the person to sort the buttons into piles of different colours, perhaps putting all the red buttons together on a red card, blue buttons on a blue card, etc.

This can be made more meaningful if the objects used are important or familiar in some way. It can also be therapeutic, because moving one's hands through the cool, hard kernels provides pleasant sensory stimulation.

Fixing

Make simple, large piece jigsaws by cutting up greetings cards or pictures from magazines stuck onto card (use familiar or meaningful pictures where possible)

If the person has always been practical try to draw on this, e.g. placing pegs of graduated sizes into their respective holes in a long wooden block.

Hobbies and Crafts

Simplify old hobbies, e.g. gardening (non-toxic plants), painting, drawing, preparing food

Exercise

Exercise helps everyone, including people with dementia, to maintain a healthy appetite, get a good night's sleep and achieve a happy, endorphin-boosted outlook.

Games

e.g. Play ball. Use balloons or large, soft balls to play catch or roll backwards and forwards.

Chores

E.g. Clean up together. By involving the person in doing simple tasks such as wiping the table, sweeping, folding towels or simply holding open the refuse bag as you put things into it, he or she becomes part of a team. The tasks might not be performed to perfection, but it is the process that is important.

Reminisce

Talk about old times. Encourage the person to remember a favourite summer, first day of school or important event. Keep in mind though that painful memories may also resurface.

Go through photo albums. Old pictures can trigger pleasant memories.

Watch a favourite movie or TV show from their past.

Go through a box of trinkets from their life.

Music

Some music therapists have found that adults with advanced Alzheimer's often respond to music, and especially music from their past. In fact, researchers have found that the ability to process music remains intact into the late stages of the disease.

If the person enjoyed dancing, they probably still do, or at least will respond to the sight of others dancing. You could get others to dance and let the person be the audience.

Animals

Relax by watching birds from a window or fish in an aquarium.

Sensory

Remember that as dementia advances, the person will retain all of his or her senses.

Talk to him and her. Even though the person may not respond, this doesn't mean that he or she is not aware of your presence.

Give a manicure or a hand massage with oil.

Give textured items to hold.

Multi-sensory prompts for communication

ACTIVITY	VERBAL PROMPT	MIME	PHOTOGRAPH	VISUAL PROMPT	SMELL PROMPT	TACTILE PROMPT
Having a bath	"[NAME] it's time for your bath"	Washing hair and body	Photo of the bath/person in the bath	Towel Bubble bath	Bubble bath	Touch/feel towel
Going out in the car						