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<b>Guidelines on Creative and Sensory Activities for People with Dementia and other neurological conditions</b>		

<b>Guidelines on Creative and Sensory Activities for people with dementia and other neurological conditions.</b>	
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1. Introduction.

Aims of Creative and Sensory Activities for older People.

- To promote wellbeing
- To help maintain skills
- To use other senses to aid communication by using sensory rather than cognitive pathways.
- To maintain and enhance relationships
- For relaxation
- To utilize past skills
- To express emotion
- To facilitate decision making
- As a means of cooperating with others

General Tips for nursing care of bed bound residents.

**Rule of thumb; if you are bored doing an activity, chances are the resident is as well.**

Focus on getting a connection between yourself and the resident in all activities even if only a smile.

Provide music and sensory aromatherapy around bath times.

Don't shower people who are resistive to showering. Try a bath instead.

Ensure the bathroom is warm and that towels have been warmed.

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Consider using warm wet bath towels that can be placed over a resident for washing purposes instead of a bath/shower.

**Nutrition.**

Provide snacks regularly instead of a large lunch or tea for those who are unable to eat lunches and teas.

Sing simple songs.

Say familiar prayers.

Brush Resident’s hair and put on face moistuisers.

Massage hands and feet with creams

Gentle soothing music in the background when undertaking any activity.

Use of aromatherapy when undertaking activities.

Have framed photographs

Put flyers into envelopes.

Fold towels.

Fold t towels,

Fold socks.

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Tactile sensations, wool, silk, satin, tweed, carpet, vinyl. etc.

Scent sensations: Oranges, apples, bananas, a flower, scents, perfumes, old spice, Chanel no 5,

Sand paper blocks,

Help sort out a deck of cards

Have a group activity for those who wander only.

Have a men's group only

Auditory sensations, tap on table, bang two spoons together, Tap spoon against a glass

Walk around the grounds for those who are mobile or in wheelchairs.

As a care worker, you have an opportunity to change a routine task into a positive experience, depending on how you approach the person and the activity.

When helping someone to get up in the morning, the following ideas give examples of putting 'activity' into 'care':

- Drawing the curtains with the person to check out the weather and having the usual chat about the Weather!
- supporting a person to continue their preferred routine when they wake up, for example, turning on the radio, having a drink, looking at the newspaper offering visual choices of what to wear and a chance to talk about preferences, for example of trousers versus skirts or different colours.

Often, it's not *what* you do but the *way* that you do it that matters most. In one care home the domestic worker takes a puppet around with her as she is doing the dusting which provides lots of moments of fun and interaction.

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**Look around you.**

If you are in a care home, have a look at the lounges and corridors to see what is there to stimulate the senses. An overly tidy environment offers nothing for people to look at, pick up, touch or even tidy themselves.

As dementia progresses, it is important to think about activities that are less reliant on words and intellect and find things that can stimulate all five key senses. These are: sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.

Starting to skip in the middle of the living room with a real skipping rope, for example, is more likely to engage a person with dementia than simply asking them what games they used to play as a child. The skipping rope and the actions are likely to trigger memories much more immediately than using verbal questions.

When planning an activity – whether for an individual or a group – think about having something *physical* to get the body moving, something *mental* to engage the brain, and something *sensory* to stimulate the senses (for more practical activity ideas) A number of different approaches within dementia care offer helpful ways to develop meaningful activity and improve quality of life for people with dementia.

Some depend on using a particular practical resource, some emphasise skilful assessment before planning activities. Others promote a programme, philosophy or therapeutic intervention.

Dementia can have a devastating effect on people’s cognitive abilities. Interestingly, however, the creative, imaginative and emotional parts of a person often remain relatively strong.

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People with dementia can also lose some inhibition and therefore might feel more free to express themselves creatively and spontaneously.

There have been some wonderful developments in creative work with people with dementia in the past decade – these have shown how important it is to celebrate a person’s potential rather than always focus on problems and deficits.

Have you ever spent time really listening to the words of people who have dementia?

The words may be very muddled and it might be easy to switch off listening. But, if you take time to listen, there are often very important messages to be heard through the muddled words which can often have a quite symbolic or poetic quality.

Quite often the person is trying to communicate something very important either about their past life or their present situation or perhaps about both.

A person with dementia often will remember the words of verses, songs and hymns when other parts of their memory are much damaged. Singing helps lift spirits raise energy levels and feel connected with others! Many people with dementia do not always feel their voice is heard, so it provides an immediate sense of self-worth if they can sing and have others notice and respond.

When you are working with a person with dementia, it might help to suggest or start singing a song. You will be surprised how often a person with dementia will come to life and join in with great enjoyment.

One home care worker found that one of her clients with dementia hated having a wash, but when she incorporated singing a few favourite songs into the activity, her client was immediately more willing to go into the bathroom.

If you are not from the same cultural background of the person you are working with, you may need to find out about the types of music that they might respond to. You might even ask your manager

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to purchase some relevant song sheets so that you could help prompt a person by asking if they know a particular song.

When verbal communication is challenging, holding and playing an instrument, even if only for a few minutes, offers a person a chance to be ‘in control’, express something about themselves and their mood. Many people with dementia find new ways to communicate through music perhaps with their eyes, their arms or their feet.

Some music collections in homes or day centres can be very limited. Older people do not just like music from the 1930s and 1940s! ‘Rock and roll’ collections from the 1960s or classical collections might be more popular.

It is not unusual for people who have dementia in care settings to have less access to outside space, particularly as they become less mobile and more advanced in their illness. Yet going outside can stimulate the brain and improve the mood in a way that inside activities cannot.

Access to fresh air doesn’t have to involve long coach trips to the seaside. Posting a letter, feeding the birds or sitting by a window watching the sun setting can all bring light and pleasure to the day

Dance stimulates the brain and the body as well as tapping into the magic of music. It has lots of social elements as well as offering an opportunity for people to express themselves and most importantly to move.

You don’t have to be mobile on your feet to dance – there are a number of approaches where people can dance with their arms and feet while still seated.

Dance can even be incorporated into daily living tasks – try doing a dance with a person while walking into the dining room or the toilet!

A physiotherapist or a suitably trained fitness professional can help to devise exercise programmes for an individual or run regular group exercise programmes.

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Seated exercise sessions can sometimes be run by care staff if they have been given training particularly in relation to any health contra-indications to be aware of.

It can be easy to assume that when a person is no longer communicating with words or is spending much of their day in bed, the emphasis will be on keeping the person physically comfortable and activities become less relevant. However, a person in the advanced stages of dementia can still experience emotions such as loneliness, boredom or frustration (for more on this, see the feature ‘Being withdrawn’ in the ‘Difficult situations’ section).

A person might no longer be able to move independently or hold a conversation. However, many people with dementia will respond positively to close one-to-one attention using the eyes to communicate or hands to touch and make a connection.

If you are comfortable ‘just being’ with the person, you may choose to simply sit and spend time with the person, and respond to anything that they might be doing or noises they might be making.

Sometimes there will be lovely moments when the person’s facial expressions – sparkling eyes, a smile or a grip of the hand – will indicate that the person is noticing and responding to our attempts to reach out to them. However, there will be other times when the person doesn’t open their eyes or even appears to turn their head or body away from us, which can make us wonder whether we are getting through to the person. It is important to continue to relate to the person as if they are still able to understand what you are saying.

Barbara Pointon cared for her husband Malcolm, who had dementia, right until his death. She says Malcolm had a very expressionless and stoney face in the very late stages of his illness. She believes that he had lost his ability to synchronise his facial muscles to smile (interestingly it takes babies several weeks to learn this as we are not born with it). As a result care staff and visitors thought their efforts were having no effect. Barbara had to remind them that, although Malcolm



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could no longer outwardly express pleasure, they had no way of telling what his feelings were inside. As she said, ‘We must always trust that feelings are still there.’

Care staff will need to allow themselves the time to sit beside a person and to be as fully present as they can. It is all too easy to be distracted, to be thinking about the next job that needs to be done and not to be focused fully on the ‘here and now’ relationship. One volunteer visitor in a care home said the most important thing she offered was sitting down with residents, ‘showing that she is here to stay rather than just hovering to get away’.

Many people with dementia will sense when we are not fully present and are less likely to connect with us in any meaningful way if this is the case. If we are not paying full attention we might also miss simple movements or sounds from the person attempting to communicate something.

If you are going to sit with a person with dementia for longer than a few moments, consider the following:

- Your colleagues will need to know that you going to spend say 10 to 15 minutes in the person’s room and should not be called away to another resident or task.
- You may want to take a book to read out to the person or a piece of music to play or perhaps something that you can do in front of the person such as folding towels.
- Make sure you are in the eye line of the person if they are lying in bed or staring in a particular direction.

Sarah Zoutwelle-Morris is a visual artist living in Holland. She describes a range of different practical activities which might hold the interest or attention of a person in the later stages of dementia:

**Tapping, patting:** make a rhythmic noise together on the table using a stick or spoon, following each other’s rhythms

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**Stroking:** massage someone’s hands with scented cream or oil, giving them a chance to do the same to you if they want; pet a live or stuffed animal, or smooth a cloth on a flat surface or the person’s lap

**Pressing:** press glued paper down so it stays in place (for example, in a collage); stamp with block print or a rubber stamp; press the flat of your hand to theirs, gently giving and resisting in turn, taking your clues from them

**Pulling:** pull the wrapping paper off a package, pull clothes off a doll, or pull on a thick cord with knots

**Folding:** fold dish towels, clothes, bed linens, paper, newspaper, clay or dough.

**Pick at:** peeling paper, a torn out hem, and little threads; make a yarn card with easy knots to untie or things to pull through loops, or unravel a ball of wool

**Wrapping, concealing:** dress a doll or stuffed animal; wrap an object (say a box or bottle) in cloth or string, or wrap a present.

Music can be a vital tool in working with people with limited verbal communication. Musical memories seem well stored for many people with dementia and individuals can come to life on hearing a particular favourite song or a dance. For any person who spends large amounts of time in their own room, a good investment will be a CD player and a collection of music which relates to their background and interests.

Care staff should speak with relatives or close friends to find out whether the person loves Mozart, Elvis Presley, Scottish ballads or Bollywood music. A key worker will also need to know the times of day that a person might respond particularly well to music

Many people with dementia will respond very positively to toys or objects that they can cuddle or grasp. From a psychological perspective these can be seen to provide an attachment object or a focus for security and comfort for an individual who is feeling vulnerable in a strange and

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frightening world. Dolls or cuddly toys will not appeal to everyone, but they should be available to offer all older people who are in the moderate to later stages of dementia in order that you can observe how the individual responds

A multisensory approach becomes even more important with people with limited verbal communication. Bright colours, playful movements, funny sounds and tactile objects can all catch the attention of an individual in a way that more complicated activities no longer can.

Barbara Pointon gives some specific examples of how she tapped into all the senses in caring for her husband Malcolm:

**Sight:** bright colours (for example flowers, particularly the red/yellow end of the spectrum), plenty of transfers between bed, wheelchair and recliner chairs so that the person isn't looking at the same bit of wall all day; smiley faces; views through the open patio door in summer, and mobiles hung from the ceiling (but check that they are acceptable and don't get mistaken for something sinister hovering above).

**Taste:** continuing to feed orally even when swallowing was faltering, and trying stronger, sweeter flavours. Cold drinks are more easily sensed in the mouth than tepid ones. Remember to talk to the person about what they are eating.

**Smell:** favourite aftershave, flowers, home cooking, aromatherapy oils.

**Hearing:** favourite music, care staff singing or humming, people coming in to play an instrument or sing to him, sound of laughter, birdsong, talking to the person often (even when no obvious response).

**Touch:** ('the most important of all') holding hands, stroking face, giving a hug, helping the person to feel loved and cherished.

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Some creative work has been tried in relation to applying the ideas of ‘coma work’ (an approach to working with people in withdrawn states, such as a coma) to working with people with dementia. This approach was developed in the United States in the 1980s by Arnold and Amy Mindell.

Anna Lidzey (2004), an English art therapist, describes the aim of coma work as ‘to provide a loving sense of companionship and to allow the creative spirit to unravel, to trust, follow and honour each person’s unique journey’ (p 20).

This approach requires the care worker to pay particular attention to the non-verbal aspects of a person’s communication: their breathing, their eye movement, any changes in the skin, vocalizations such as repeated noises and the general atmosphere and mood surrounding the person. The key feature of the approach is that the worker should watch for signs of any kind of activity from the person with dementia and be led by these rather than taking over and dominating the communication themselves.

Rosemary Clarke attended a course on coma work and found it to have amazing benefits in her caring role with her mother. In an article for the Journal of Dementia Care, Rosemary describes how she learnt to sit very close to her mother so she could talk into her ear. She would pay attention to what her mother might be doing, for example, she would be chewing or moving one finger a tiny bit or sighing. She would then focus on one of these activities and support her mother to ‘go with’ that impulse, ‘to give it its fullest expression’. She would therefore encourage her chewing with ‘that’s good, you really chew it’ or ‘that’s fine, you chew it over’.

Sometimes Rosemary would respond to her mother’s moving finger by having a finger ‘dance’ with her own index finger, ‘talking’ to each other through applying pressure from the finger – whether slow and soft or firm and persistent. All the time Rosemary would be giving verbal encouragement ‘What an energetic/busy/strong finger!’, ‘This is lovely, our fingers are talking.’

As a result of this approach, Rosemary describes how her mother started to ‘speak’ more often than she had before, sometimes with words and sometimes with sounds. On one occasion, even before Rosemary had sat down beside her, she looked up and said ‘hello darling’ (see Clarke, 2004).

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## **Activity**

Spend 5 to 10 minutes observing a person with dementia who is in the later stages of dementia. You might decide to do this with a colleague so you can reflect on the experience together afterwards and compare what you both observed. You may have different interpretations of what the person is trying to express.

The person you are observing is likely to be immobile and may have very limited verbal communication. Watch closely for any signs of movement in the person's body or any sounds that they make.

Do you understand what the person might be trying to express? Might it be a sign of pain or discomfort? Or does it seem to be a positive emotion or noise that the person is communicating? Choose a simple activity to try out with the person. You might want to choose a book or a magazine which relates in some way to the interests of the person, for example a book about railways for a train enthusiast or a recipe book for a keen cook. Alternatively you could choose a poem, a song or a popular children's verse. If you would prefer to do a more practical activity, you could do a hand massage with some hand cream. Give yourself at least 10 minutes of uninterrupted one-to-one time to sit with the person.

Try reading out loud from the book or reciting or singing the song.

If you are giving a hand massage take time to explain what you would like to do and ask permission. Tell the person the name of the hand cream and tell them if it is a little cold.

Watch for signs of response from the person. Stop for a minute or two to see if the person gives some indication they would like you to continue.

Do not give up too quickly. It might take time for the person to appear to notice what you are saying or doing.

Make sure when you finish the activity, you ask the person if they have liked what you were doing. Even a small gesture of the hand, a facial expression or a noise might give you a sense of whether the person is enjoying the activity.

Our senses... sight, smell, taste, touch and hearing connect our minds with the world around us.

Many older adults experience difficulties with some of the senses. When this happens to a person with Alzheimer Disease or a related disorder, it can contribute to some of the confusion that he/she

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is already experiencing. Although the person may not always be able to make sense of complicated sensory stimuli, he/she still derives enjoyment from pleasant sensations and is turned off by unpleasant ones. Stimulating the senses of the person with dementia has many positive benefits. There are no boundaries to sensory stimulation; it can include a variety of activities, and is limited only when the facilitator limits it.

## **Benefits**

Considerable attention has been given to exploring the benefits of sensory stimulation with older adults and specifically, people with Alzheimer Disease or a related disorder. Benefits include such things as increased socialization, increased concentration, improved self-concept and increased alertness.

Many benefits have been found by creating an environment that gently stimulates all of the senses. Although we have listed many specific activities, it is important to constantly keep an environment alive, offering opportunities for stimulating as many senses as possible, and being careful not to give unsuitable stimulation, which could cause anxiety.

It is valuable to draw on emotions and memories by getting in touch with all 5 senses. You'll never know the memories that will arise through different processes.

## **Smell**

The sense of smell is one of the most meaningful in terms of connecting us to our past and bringing back memories. No matter what your age, ability or disability, smells have a powerful effect. They can be pleasant, strong, relaxing, or comforting, and can elicit many emotions. Think of how you feel when you smell a warm batch of bread baking in the oven and the memories it brings to mind.

Consider:

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▲ Baking, or using other distinct smells, such as:

▲ coffee	▲ rose water	▲ mint
▲ lavender	▲ perfume or aftershave	▲ cinnamon
▲ orange	▲ vanilla	▲ herbs
▲ ginger	▲ herbal tea	▲ baby powder

Try to identify a smell or use it for reminiscing.

▲ The aroma diffuser is growing in popularity. With this, you select the scented oil you want and use some means of diffusion to spread the aroma.

## Sight

No matter what your age, it is pleasing to view something you consider beautiful or memorable.

Consider:

- ▲ Using bright and fun or soft colours with a person with dementia. These colours can be quite engaging and pleasant. When using fabrics, however, avoid complex patterns, as it might be confusing for the person.
- ▲ Looking at pictures or watching TV shows consisting of beautiful scenery, animals (if they derive joy from animals), or beautiful lights.
- ▲ Looking at pictures or shows of places that they've visited, or lived is also a great reminiscing instrument. Often it is a picture of a place, a person or event that triggers a memory more than just words. An example could be a picture of a baby that reminds him/her of a birth or a picture

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of a steamer or a large fisher boat that would remind him/her of coming to Ireland or a memorable trip. Please see information on Reminiscing for more details.

## **Touch**

Meaningful touch can be an extremely important communication tool with people with dementia. Whether it is a hug, a handshake, or simply holding hands, touching elicits an emotional response that is unparalleled. Even basic touching, such as a touch on the shoulder should be incorporated into any interaction.

Consider:

- ▲ An activity such as giving someone a manicure, doing their hair or giving a massage, can often leave that person relaxed and with a sense of being worthy of being touched.
- ▲ Animals provide an unconditional love and, in turn, need love and care from humans. Confirm that the person enjoys pets first and then bring in an animal. This can help the person feel needed and highly valued. It can also be useful for reminiscence.
- ▲ Identifying everyday objects in a deep bag or pieces of material of different textures. Turn it into a reminiscence activity if you have a group.
- ▲ You could also pick something out of a basin of water, such as soap or a sponge, or use play-dough or clay. These can all help strengthen the person's hands.

## **Hearing**



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Listening to sounds is a very important aspect of getting in touch with our senses. Although many older adults have hearing impairments, it is still important to stimulate this sense, keeping in mind that modifications may need to be made.

Consider:

- ▲ Listening to music, sounds of nature, singing, or poetry can all be very enjoyable, when done right. It is very important to remember to be sensitive to the person's choice. Often, music or some other noise can be enjoyable for one person but can be irritating and even aggravating for someone else.
  
- ▲ It is important to remember to keep the noise level controlled. Too much noise can be frustrating for a person with dementia. It can cause the person to feel anxious or unsettled.

## **Taste**

Food can bring back many memories.

Consider:

- ▲ If possible it can be pleasurable to share in meals or foods from their childhood and even prepare these together.
  
- ▲ Sweets and even special drinks can be a nice treat and going out to find these either at a candy store or an old eatery can be even better.

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## **Theme Kits**

An enjoyable activity that can be done individually or in a group is that of theme activity. These are bags or boxes of items that relate to a particular theme.

For instance, if you wanted to talk about memories of winter or simply the season itself, you could fill a kit with:

▲ Mittens	▲ Paper snowflake
▲ Cassette tape of Christmas/winter music	▲ Hot chocolate
▲ Cinnamon sticks	▲ Snowman figurine
▲ Real snow to touch and handle (if it's winter)	▲ Sleigh bells
▲ Gift box	▲ Christmas cake

## **Later on in the Disease**

These activities are not limited to the experience of any particular point in the disease. In fact, different experiences have been shown to have benefits for the person earlier on in their illness, and some have been more suitable for the person experiencing more advanced symptoms of dementia. Although this information mainly explores the sensory activities that work best when the individual maintains some form of verbal communication, it is important to remember that connecting with the senses later on in the disease is often a valuable way to communicate with the person.