

GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING AN ACTIVITY

Choosing an Activity

- Focus on remaining skills and knowledge, not on the lost abilities.
- Pay attention to the person's personality, likes, dislikes, and their past life experience.
- Keep in mind that because of dementia, the person's preferences and personality may be changing. They may be open to trying things that they would not have considered previously.
- Whenever possible, keep some activities consistent throughout the different stages of the illness.
- Choose activities that do not appear to be childish for the person with dementia. It does not matter if they appear childish to you.
- There will be good days and bad days. Activities that do not work one day may work another day, with or without adjustments.
- If at all possible, suggest an activity that both you and the person with dementia will enjoy doing. If the person is not interested, propose another activity that you may also enjoy.
- Be aware of physical problems that might interfere with participation.

In the later stages of dementia:

- Repetitive activities are appropriate, as they are calming and soothing.
- Fewer activities are needed as the person has less energy and needs more downtime.

Where and When

- Choose the time of day that is the most appropriate for a specific activity. For example, for an activity that requires concentration and energy, choose a time when the person's level of functioning is at its highest. For an activity where the goal is to relieve tension, choose a time of day when the person tends to appear anxious, or just before that feeling usually occurs.
- Make sure that the environment is safe for the person with dementia.
- Ensure that the environment is quiet and does not have too many distractions.
- Make sure that the lighting is appropriate (bright enough, no glare).
- You can set up a designated activity area where the person can choose between a few activities and where the materials are in plain sight.
- Whenever possible, integrate activities into a daily routine. Structure helps to orient the person with dementia.

In the later stages of dementia:

- Doing activities in a familiar environment helps to reduce stress and allows for better participation.
- Scheduling activities into a daily routine provides structure and a sense of safety, and helps to orient the person throughout the day.

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How To

- Introduce the activity by asking the person if they can help you with a project (or a chore).
- Break down instructions into a few simple steps.
- Demonstrate as you instruct.
- Offer help only when it is needed.
- Be patient, slow down and repeat instructions as needed.
- Be supportive and encouraging. Do not criticize.
- Keep adapting familiar activities to the person's changing skill level.
- Do the activity with the person, or at least begin the activity with the person, as a way to show the different steps involved (it is often easier to mimic someone rather than listen to a set of instructions).
- You can do part of an activity and let the person complete the activity.
- Ask the person with dementia to do only some parts of a project. For example, while gardening, you can dig a hole and then let the person with dementia place the plant in it. Then you can fill the hole with dirt and water the plant.
- Thank the person, or express your appreciation when the activity is over.
- Once an activity is over, assess its success. Was it enjoyable? Was it too difficult? Too easy? Adapt the activity accordingly for the next time.
- Remember that the goal is not the final product, but the enjoyment of the activity.

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In the later stages of dementia:

- Involve as many of the five senses as possible when explaining an activity.
- Offer lots of support. Stay nearby if this seems to reassure the person.
- Be careful not to over stimulate the person with too many activities.
- Keep activities short as the person's energy level and ability to concentrate decrease.

** Many thanks to Tracey Leslie, Recreation Therapist, for her contribution to this handout.*