



# Provide activities to maintain a person's ability, dignity and self-worth

## Aims and learning outcomes

The aim of this section is that participants will learn about the role of assisting persons who have dementia to maintain their ability, dignity and sense of self-worth through meaningful activities. At the end of this section participants will be able to:

- Define the concept of meaningful activities in the lives of people who have dementia.
- State the purpose of activity.
- Identify and apply appropriate activities to maintain a person's self esteem and dignity, skills and health.
- Make sure activities ensure the safety and comfort of the person with dementia and are balanced with autonomy and risk taking

## Associated materials

- PowerPoint presentation: 12 Activities 2007.
- Handout: Key Principles in using activities.
- Handout: Planning and Providing Activities
- Assessment Task 8: Activity Plan

### 12.1 What is an activity?

#### 12.1 Exercise What is an activity?

**Purpose:** To define the concept of activity and identify the meaning and significance of activity.

#### What is required

Ask participants to make a list of everything they did today from the time they opened their eyes in the morning until they came to this session.

This can be done as an individual or group exercise.

Discuss how we do these things without thinking about them, and take them for granted. But what would happen if we could not do these things?

Now ask them to imagine they have a broken arm and leg and to cross off all the things they would not be able to do without assistance.

## Discussion points

How do you feel?

- Responses you may expect are helpless, frustrated, angry, loss of self esteem, etc.

What would you do?

- Some may try harder to do things their own way, some may be happy to rely on others, etc.

You can relate their responses to their different personality/ coping styles.

Relate these to the experiences of a person who has dementia.

## Points to cover

An activity is anything that we do from the time we open our eyes in the morning until the time we go to sleep at night – even sleeping is an important activity. The everyday things have meaning for us; they also have meaning for a person who has dementia.

Activities include:

- occupation: our role or the work that we do
- leisure: the special things such as sport, hobbies and relaxation that each of us likes to do such as going to the football, yarning with our friends, dancing or painting
- self care: (sometimes called ADLs or Activities of Daily Living, which includes all of our hygiene and personal care).

Different people see different activities as work or leisure. For some cooking is leisure, while for others it is work.

Activities for a person who has dementia should meet their individual needs and maintain their abilities.

Successful activities will:

- be appropriate to the age and culture of the person
- tap into all senses, sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste
- have physical, social and mental benefits
- balance safety and comfort with risk taking and autonomy
- reflect the person's likes and dislikes
- be enjoyable
- be within the person's physical and cognitive ability
- maximise success.



It is therefore necessary to know about the person's life, their personality, interests and hobbies. It is also important to know what they enjoy now.

While a person with dementia may not remember an activity after they have performed it, they may retain the feelings created.

Family and community members can assist to us access information about the person, their lifestyle and preferences, and assist in developing appropriate activities.

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## 12.2 Why do activities?

Meaningful activities support our self-esteem. They have many important purposes, for example:

- to maintain and develop intellectual, physical, practical and social skills and abilities
- to provide enjoyment and stimulation
- to compensate for losses
- to promote feelings of self-esteem
- as a means of communication
- as a means of managing behaviour
- as a means of assessment.

## 12.3 Kinds of activity

### Activities to maintain and develop physical skills

We know that we need to exercise to keep fit. It is no different for people with dementia, although they may lack the memory and the drive to exercise. We can build exercise into a normal day's routine through activities such as shopping or gardening. We can do the same for less fit people if we take some time.

Agitation can also be constructively channelled into exercises such as dancing.

### Activities to maintain and develop cognitive skills

"Use it or lose it" is as good a saying for the brain as it is for joints and muscles. Skills must be used to be maintained.

Find out what the person's remaining abilities and skills are and work with these. They are likely to be the abilities and skills used in their work, home or leisure.

### Activities to maintain and develop social skills

Social skills must also be used if they are to be maintained. We can all lose our nerve in social situations and this is more likely for people who cannot remember who people are or what behaviour is appropriate. People with dementia may need a lot of encouragement to help them to know how to behave. Sharing activities with people is a way of making communication natural and easy. People can talk while walking, or while playing a familiar game.

### Activities to provide relaxation

Some people with dementia will not be able to take part in many physical activities, but this does not mean they have lost their capacity for enjoyment and relaxation. For many people, dementia is a source of great anxiety and tension. Relaxation through music, light, warmth, smell and touch benefits everyone – not least tired family carers and busy care staff.

### Activities to promote confidence and self-esteem

To many people, dementia means failure and an inability to cope. Activities should build up confidence and self-esteem. Everyone with dementia can do something and derive some satisfaction from it. This is another good reason to find out about the person – what skills have they used in the past, what do they enjoy now?

### Activities to manage behaviour we find 'difficult'

People with dementia who are relaxed, busy and confident are less likely to be aggressive or agitated. People with behaviour changes that cause concern (also called Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD) and often called 'challenging behaviour' although this term is no longer favoured) must be fully assessed, and activities should form a central part of their care. All types of behaviour occur for a reason. They may be the result of physical discomfort, confusion, fear, or an unmet emotional need. Try to find out what the problem is. Many people with dementia are labelled as 'wanderers' but there is always a reason behind a person's pacing or walking around. Often, they are looking for somebody or something familiar. Try to understand why a person is doing this and accommodate their needs. This may be partly achieved through certain activities.

### Activities as a means of assessment

Taking part in activities is the most natural way to assess someone with dementia. Using normal, everyday activities, you can assess a range of skills such as co-ordination, concentration and memory.

Sudden deterioration of abilities is a matter for concern – it can mean that there is a physical problem that needs attention, such as constipation or an infection.

#### Remember:

#### Activities are part of the therapeutic process

Everything that we do has the potential to be therapeutic. Too often, activities are seen only as recreational events. This means they are considered to be extra jobs that can be organised when there is nothing else to do. By taking this approach, the therapeutic potential in everyday activities is missed.

#### Start with everyday tasks

There are numerous activities that we can introduce into the day of someone who has dementia, besides the basic tasks of eating, washing, sleeping and going to the toilet. For example we can add a whole range of activities to mealtimes if we include people with dementia in the planning, shopping, preparation, cooking, the clearing away and washing-up.

#### Use your knowledge about the person with dementia

When deciding what activities to do with someone with dementia, it is best if you know them as well as possible. They might hate kitchen chores but enjoy ironing. They might dislike baths but love showers. Once you know a person's history and preferences, there are masses of possibilities, including conversation topics.

(Adapted from Alzheimer's Society, 2002 Yesterday, today & tomorrow)

## 12.4 Key principles in using activities

### Cater to individual needs

An activity that is meaningful or purposeful for one person may not be for another – consider the lifestyle of an individual: routines, ways they do things, including likes and dislikes unique to that individual.

Tailor activities to individual needs and preferences through knowing and respecting the person, assessment of their preferences and abilities and, where appropriate, through the development of care plans.

### Use activities that define success

Choose activities that are meaningful and likely to be failure free, and that build self-esteem, achieve respect, and reflect daily living skills.

### Plan carefully

Prepare and practise for activities and have all equipment ready. Plan carefully for different levels of ability. Structure activities with movement from a higher level of ability to an easier, slower pace and back again.

### Choose activities carefully

Select age-appropriate / adult-level activities that require simple skills. Take a 'one step at a time' approach to doing activities and vary the methods used. Be clear about your aims and goals.

### Consider the environment

Think about the room or space, noise level, lighting, chairs, access to the outdoors, and memory aids. Safety issues need to be considered, for example, where sharp utensils, fire or rugged terrain may cause harm.

### Choose activities that use skills

Use the skills of person with dementia and build on their strengths. Match activities to different abilities. Use activities that work with the behaviour of participants. Encourage play and imagination.

### Review and assess abilities

Observe people's preferences. Talk individually to people with dementia and their carers. Consider the effect of each individual on the group and vice versa.



## 12.5 Planning and providing activities

Planning activities, or activity programming, is essential for the person with dementia. Activity programming includes the following steps:

### Step 1 Identify

Identify types of activity that will meet a person's individual needs and preferences.

Know the person, their past lifestyle or life history, culture, likes, dislikes and such as

- Did she like cooking or going for walks?
- Was he a social person who enjoyed yarning with relatives?
- What does he/she like now?
- What routines will provide comfort and identity?
- What are his/her strengths that need to be maintained (e.g. skills, mobility, communication) in order to promote independence, self determination and feelings of self esteem and dignity?

### Step 2 Plan

Plan activities that are failure free and maintain ability, self-worth and dignity.

- Activities that match the person's needs, routines and preferences.
- A variety – structured and unstructured activities; group and individual activities; indoors and outdoors.
- Can we use skills of others (e.g. workers, family and volunteers) for this activity?
- What resources do we need for the activity?
- Does it depend on weather, temperature of the day?
- Is there a safety issue? What can we put in place to prevent harm?

### Step 3 Offer

Offer and encourage participation.

- How you convey the event or activity to an individual depends on the person's cognitive ability.
- How you invite the person to attend/participate will depend on the individual and the situation – you may talk to the person or use an appropriate form of written communication such as a flyer or newsletter.
- Remind and encourage the person to attend – making decisions may be difficult for the person with dementia.
- Do not force; the person has a right to say no. The person may be feeling tired or unwell at the time.

### Step 4 Evaluate

- Did the activity achieve its planned purpose?
- What was the outcome for the person with dementia?
- Recommendations for future?
- Document.

## Tips for a program of activities

### Daily

- Include a mix of familiar and new activities.
- Schedule more cognitive (thinking) tasks in the morning.
- Plan special activities to reduce afternoon restlessness.

### Weekly

- Introduce themes that can be repeated.
- Choose activities to appeal to particular individuals each day.

### Monthly

- Introduce a mix of events, parties and festivals
- Celebrate local traditions and holidays.

## 12.2 Exercise: Activity examples

**Purpose:** To identify examples of the types of activities.

### What is required

This can be a group activity or completed individually.

Provide each participant with a hand-out of the table below.

They are to provide an example for each point below.

Ask participants to THINK specifically about a person with dementia that they are caring for, so they can begin to build up a file of activities that are purposeful and enjoyable.

Some examples include ADLs such as getting dressed, singing, dancing, art, painting, craft activities, cards, walking, cooking, quizzes, crossword puzzles, photo albums, favourite videos, bus trips, creating sensory environments.

Features of successful activities	Examples of activities
Have a purpose but also give the person pleasure in doing.	
Fulfil a need for self expression.	
Take into account lifestyle and old routines, activities and interests, boosting self esteem, confidence and safety.	
Allow opportunities for repetition, which often helps people with dementia, feel comfortable.	
Tap into some of the five senses.	
Take advantage of old skills and thereby comfort the person with dementia by helping to reinforce their identity.	
Include some physical activity where appropriate, so mobility can be improved. This may also improve sleep patterns.	

## ASSESSMENT TASK 8 ACTIVITY PLAN

In the first three columns, make a list of the strengths, difficulties and past lifestyle/interests of a person with dementia that you know. In the activities column, describe three to five activities that would be suitable for this person. In the "Purpose of the activity" column, identify what the activity will achieve for this person and in the final column, how you would evaluate the activity.

Strengths	Difficulties	Lifestyle and interests including position in the community and cultural role	Activities	Purpose of the activity	Evaluation