



Don't know what to say
to someone you love
living with dementia?

RELATE, MOTIVATE, APPRECIATE

An Introduction to Montessori Activities

**UNDERSTAND ALZHEIMER'S
EDUCATE AUSTRALIA**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This introductory booklet is part of the *RELATE, MOTIVATE, APPRECIATE: A Montessori resource*; to promote positive interaction with people with dementia. The production of this resource was made possible through funding from the Alzheimer's Australia National Quality Dementia Care Initiative which is supported by the J.O. & J.R. Wicking Trust and Bupa.

We would also like to acknowledge the following people who contributed to the development of this book and DVD: Juanita Beckinschtein, Dr Eva van der Ploeg, Anne Kelly, Dr Tanya Petrovich and Dr David Sykes.

Thanks and appreciation is extended to members of the Alzheimer's Australia Consumer Dementia Research Network as well as the Board, Management, Staff and the wonderful families and residents of Emmy Monash Aged Care Facility including:

Hadassa Berkowicz and Miriam Mohr, daughters of Esther Berkowicz

Esther Meltzer, daughter of Keith Solomon

Jill Kadar, daughter-in-law of Agnes Kadar

Abe Segal, husband of Hettie Segal

Cathy Dowden, daughter-in-law of Lucien Gruner.

Our gratitude to these families for sharing their stories and time for this Montessori resource.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For a more detailed guide, including further activity ideas and suggestions, please refer to the larger resource (*RELATE, MOTIVATE, APPRECIATE: A Montessori resource*) available at www.fightdementia.org.au



The greatest source of
discouragement is the
conviction that one is unable
to do something

MARIA MONTESSORI

**HOW TO RESTORE
MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT
WHEN VISITING SOMEONE
LIVING WITH DEMENTIA**

INTRODUCTION

Mum didn't want me to tell anyone about the diagnosis. I went home alone to my apartment, and cried and cried – for myself, mainly: that soon my own mother wouldn't know me. At that moment, I thought that was the worst thing I could imagine.

VIVIENNE ULMAN. *ALZHEIMER'S: A LOVE STORY*

FIND THE INDIVIDUAL

- The person living with dementia may forget your name, shared experiences, and interests you both enjoyed. They may even have changed their personality; however, despite dementia, they are still a person.
- It is important to focus on the person they are now and respect what they are dealing with.
- While your interactions with them may change over time, the essentials of the interests they have can remain.
- Even if your relationship with the person was not physically demonstrative, you may find that gentle touch – holding hands, linking arms, or a hug – becomes more important.
- Always remember that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to do activities. If the person is happy afterwards, it was a good activity and a good visit. If they are not the activity may need to be changed, or replaced.

Your relationship with the person living with dementia has no doubt changed, but you can still maintain the special bond and connect in meaningful ways. We have developed this guide, which contains a range of ideas and suggestions on how to maintain this connection.

1. Ulman V, 2009: *Alzheimer's: A Love Story*, Scribe

WHO WAS MARIA MONTESSORI?

Dr Maria Montessori was the first female doctor in Italy. A woman ahead of her time, her way of thinking in the 19th century aligns with our person-centred approach to dementia care.

The Montessori method emphasises the importance of keeping the person living with dementia as independent as possible for as long as possible.

Independence is kept through different activities: sensory, social and cognitive, and activities of daily living.



Robert and Kate's story

Robert was an electrician for almost forty years. His strength was in solving electromechanical problems. He now lives with Alzheimer's disease in a facility's Memory Support Unit. He is mobile and able to verbalise, although as the disease has progressed he has isolated himself. His daughter Kate was visiting him often, but her visits became more infrequent until she had not visited him for almost a month. 'Dad is not the Dad I know', she said. 'The Dad I know is gone.'

With encouragement Kate resumed her visits to her dad. Kate was shown an activity to engage with *her* Dad. The activity chosen tapped into Robert's past experiences. Kate was very cautious and doubted that her dad would agree to do anything with her. She asked her father to help her fix a torch. At first Kate thought this too basic for her father. However, Robert picked up the torch parts and put it together slowly and efficiently. Kate then asked her father, 'You know Dad, I always wanted to know what is inside a battery that makes it work?' Robert talked about the components of the battery and then how he learnt his trade as a young man.

Kate now thinks of other items to use to connect with her father. She recently asked him to help to fix an old radio. She also brought him his well-worn tools. She offered him her help and he accepted it. With very slow movements Robert started to work. Very softly he said 'We are a good team, eh Kate?' 'We are Dad, we are' she said.



WHAT MAKES A GOOD INTERACTION?

HOW TO HAVE A MEANINGFUL INTERACTION WITH SOMEONE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

Meaningful experiences that engage are important for us all, and this does not change when someone develops dementia. Engaging visits are an important part of the person's life, regardless of whether they are living at home or in residential care. They may not be able to remember the details of the interaction, or that you visited at all, what is important is what they experience in that moment of being with you.

So what helps to make an interaction meaningful? The most important aspects are that you both:

- enjoy the time you spend together – enjoyment
- get involved as much as possible – participation.

WHY DOES THE MONTESSORI APPROACH WORK?

You may be thinking 'I've tried everything but nothing works.'

People living with dementia show progressively more and more difficulties remembering people's names and recent events. They may struggle with simple tasks and almost certainly will struggle with abstract concepts and complex tasks.

Conversations such as you had previously may not be possible anymore – the person may struggle pronouncing words or constructing sentences, or they may lose their speech or revert back to a first language that you may not be able to comprehend or speak.

One of the main Montessori principles emphasises using less language, while at the same time promoting non-verbal communication by demonstrating everything that you would like the person to engage with.

In other words, talk less and demonstrate more!

When using less language in your interactions, you are likely to avoid any

frustration or disappointment on the person's part about not being able to respond to questions verbally. You will also allow them to focus all their attention on what you are demonstrating. This may make it easier for them to imitate your actions.

In addition, all the Montessori principles have been designed to work with a certain type of memory (implicit, or procedural), which is less affected by dementia than other types of memory. This type of memory works with habits and muscle memory. This memory is the 'how' of memory. The person may still know how to shake someone's hand, how to eat, how to smile. This is why, if you hand the person something (at the right angle and pace), they will usually take it. If it is something as lovely as a scented flower they may even smell it, as this is the automatic learned response to a flower. It may even be possible for the person to learn how to do other (new) things if you demonstrate and allow them to copy. In addition, they will get better at doing something the more they practise it, even when they may not recall having done it; this is another benefit of using implicit memory.

To enhance the interaction with the person, it is important to apply all the Montessori principles (see p. 12).

The principles can be summarised in the **Relate, Motivate, Appreciate** model.



RELATE, MOTIVATE, APPRECIATE

RELATE

The person you know has lived a rich and full life. They may have been a parent, spouse, brother, sister, professional, housewife, friend and/or lover. All these roles make up the person they are and how they feel. The first and most important step is to be able to relate to and focus on what were their past experiences. This should also be informed by an understanding of the current abilities and interests the person still has.

Consider whether they are able to:

- read
- talk
- point
- hold things
- walk independently
- answer questions.

Find out:

- what they did for a living
- whether they have siblings
- what they enjoyed doing the most
- whether they travelled
- whether they are in pain or feeling unwell.

Language skills and vocabulary can diminish as dementia progresses, but the desire to communicate does not.

It can often help the interaction if you reduce how much you speak and how fast you speak and move. Tasks can also become easier for the person when you break them down into a number of smaller steps, and then demonstrate every step separately as an explanation of what you are asking them to do. Be flexible and willing to adapt to what the person is able to do on a particular day, recognising that each day may be different.

MOTIVATE

What motivates you?

Most of us are motivated by things we enjoy. When considering activities that the person might enjoy, we need to reflect on their past life experience. What activities did they do in the past? For example, did they enjoy:

- cooking? – if so, consider pouring or mixing activities
- accounting? – counting, writing
- gardening? – growing vegetables or flowers
- music? – listening, dancing, playing an instrument.

The aim should be to engage the person in a meaningful activity which is clear to follow and almost error-free. Then we may see their self-esteem rise and their sense of pride increase.

The aim should always be for them to have a positive and pleasant experience.

APPRECIATE

You may experience feelings of loss and grief for the relationship you once had with the person living with dementia. However, the person living with dementia may have experienced losing much more; for example, friends, social activities, various roles, the ability to drive, their job, their career, their partner, and the ability to dress and attend to activities of daily living.

With these in mind it is important that we try to give the person some confidence and roles back and, in that sense, return some meaning to their lives.

The aim should be to enable the person living with dementia to regain control of aspects of their life, through meaningful activities that have a purpose.

This can be achieved by firstly inviting them to participate in an activity. They may not always feel like participating and it is important to respect this choice. There always needs to be at least two choices of activity, as what was of interest yesterday may not be today.



THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

THE MONTESSORI PRINCIPLES

Relate, Motivate, Appreciate summarises the 12 key principles of the Montessori method.

- 1 The activity should have a sense of purpose and capture the person's interest.
- 2 Always invite the person to participate.
- 3 Offer choice whenever possible.
- 4 Talk less. Demonstrate more.
- 5 Physical skills; focus on what the person can do.
- 6 Match your speed with the person you are caring for. Slow down!
- 7 Use visual hints, cues or templates.
- 8 Give the person something to hold.
- 9 Go from simple tasks to more complex ones.
- 10 Break a task down into steps; make it easier to follow.
- 11 To end, ask: 'Did you enjoy doing this?' and 'Would you like to do this again?'
- 12 There is no right or wrong. Think engagement.

People with dementia are often confronted with what they can no longer do or with the mistakes that they make. Montessori principles are designed to focus on what they still can do.

This is a person-centred approach focusing on the person's capabilities, capturing their interest and showing them respect. The principles are structured in the order in which you will use them when interacting with a person with dementia.

PREPARE

In order to maximise what can be achieved through the interaction, it is important to be prepared. The following is a checklist of ideas and suggestions to help with this preparation.

- ✓ Prepare the environment by ensuring there is calmness and not too much clutter in the area where you will spend time together. Also avoid an overly stimulating environment.
- ✓ Prepare a number of activities and consider preparing the activities together with the person.
- ✓ Include a variety of activities that stimulate different senses; this recognises that different activities might appeal to the person on different days.
- ✓ It may be good to demonstrate what you want the person to do before asking them to do it.
- ✓ Avoid correcting if you think a mistake is made.
- ✓ Use safe materials; nothing sharp, or things that may look edible if they are not suitable to eat.
- ✓ Think of opportunities to make each activity easier or more complex. If the person is having difficulty engaging in the activity independently, it may help to break the activity down into smaller tasks and demonstrate each step separately.
- ✓ When music is a favourite, consider using your phone or other media player and portable speakers (because head phones may not be tolerated).
- ✓ Bring glasses, magnifiers or hearing aids if the person needs them.
- ✓ Ensure you will both be comfortable wherever you set up.
- ✓ In residential care, you may want to ask staff to assist you when seating the person.



ISSUES THAT CAN OCCUR

There are many things that can happen during your sessions. Some of these are outlined below with suggested approaches.

General

What if the person is no longer actively participating?

- Start working on an activity yourself then hand them something to hold that is associated with the activity.

What if I temporarily lose their attention because of a distraction?

- Re-establish eye contact, use their name, gently touch their hand, upper arm or upper leg, invite them to help you a bit longer.

What if the person is in the habit of pacing or wandering and tries to get up during the activities?

- Re-establish eye contact, use their name, gently touch their hand, upper arm or leg, invite them to help you a bit longer. It may really help to cross their line of vision with your hand and direct them towards what you were doing.

What if the person still wants to get up?

- Assist them with getting up, ask if you can walk with them. You can always come back to your activities later by asking if they would like to sit down again.

At home

What if old friends come to visit?

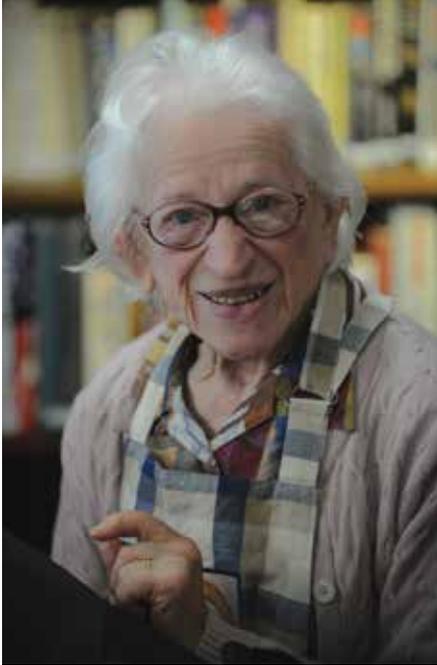
- Model how to engage the person and provide structure for everyone.

What if there is an unexpected visitor?

- Have materials (that have been shown to work, such as a memory book) at the ready in a box or bag, and invite the visitor to join. Give everyone a specific role. Preparing food together is a good option.

What if the person wants to do other things to help around the house?

- Set up routines and make a list of tasks for them. Invite them to tick boxes once they complete a task. Examples include watering plants, sweeping, and setting the table. Don't forget to demonstrate every task, and practise



If a person flees from a place it is because he has not found in it that which he needs; yet he can always return if there is a change in the environment from which he fled.

MARIA MONTESSORI

every step. At the end of each day you can make a list for the next day.

In residential care

What if another resident in the facility is interested in what we are doing?

- Acknowledge their presence by saying 'Hello ..., how are you? I am doing some work with X at the moment. Can I speak with you later?'

What if the other resident in the facility remains very interested and seems to want to participate?

- Invite them to sit down with you, hand them something that seems to interest them, bring your focus back to your person. Or, if you feel comfortable and know this person well, you can change the activity to a group activity.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

SENSORY ACTIVITIES

People living with dementia have the ability to participate in activities at different levels. What follows will guide you on how to present different sensory activities to the person according to their specific abilities.

With all these activities, it is important to remember that we should focus on the person's strengths. Encourage them to engage at whatever level of activity they are happy to be.



SIMPLE

I AM ABLE TO:

1. LISTEN, WATCH AND BE

listen to music from the past that I once enjoyed;
watch you cooking and preparing food;
watch the birds feeding in the garden

2. WATCH, LISTEN AND TALK

respond if I am asked what kind of music
I prefer to hear; tell which biscuit tastes best!;
to smell and taste the herbs
and tell you which I like or dislike

3. DO IT IF SOMEONE SHOWS ME

recognise the lyrics to the song and sing along;
cut the cookies using a cookie cutter and
we can taste them together; plant the herbs in pots

4. DO IT ALL IF SOMEONE SETS IT UP FOR ME

select and play my favourite songs if someone sets up the
iPod for me; mix all the ingredients at my own pace if
someone has them ready for me; roll the pastry and use a
biscuit cutter if no one is hurrying me; tend a small patch in
the garden, weeding, watering and harvesting

COMPLEX

THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

To optimise the interaction with your person living with dementia it is useful to keep in mind the following Montessori principles:

- 1 The activity should have a sense of purpose and capture the person's interest.
- 2 Always invite the person to participate.
- 3 Offer choice whenever possible.
- 4 Talk less. Demonstrate more.
- 5 Physical skills; focus on what the person can do.
- 6 Match your speed with the person you are caring for. Slow down!
- 7 Use visual hints, cues or templates.
- 8 Give the person something to hold.
- 9 Go from simple tasks to more complex ones.
- 10 Break a task down into steps; make it easier to follow.
- 11 To end, ask: 'Did you enjoy doing this?' and 'Would you like to do this again?'
- 12 There is no right or wrong. Think engagement.

FURTHER INFORMATION

A DVD is included with this book to provide some visuals to further guide the approach. The Montessori approach is introduced by Anne Kelly of Alzheimer's Australia Tasmania, and a brief explanation of the rehabilitative approach is given. The DVD gives an example of the Montessori principles being implemented in a stepwise fashion. You will also find examples of family members using the Montessori principles when visiting their relative living with dementia.

For additional information you may go to the Alzheimer's Australia website, fightdementia.org.au where you will find links to *RELATE*, *MOTIVATE*, *APPRECIATE*; *A Montessori Resource*. Here you will find a number of examples of different activities you may wish to try contained in a larger resource. Remember that anything can be turned into an activity if you simply relate to, motivate and appreciate the person living with dementia.

If the DVD is missing please contact
Alzheimer's Australia to receive a copy.

National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500
www.fightdementia.org.au

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