

Tips for art at home

“The power of image making is that it allows those living with dementia to express themselves in ways that are satisfying and communicate with others. The made image does not disappear and can be rediscovered.”
Pat Baines

Tips for families, friends and carers

Everyone is creative. Some people enjoy cooking, others planting gardens, choosing clothes, arranging rooms, singing or playing music. Others express their creativity with paints, in poetry or prose. Artistic expression should be a part of living positively with dementia. Here are a few tips on how to create art at home with the person you are supporting.

1. Prepare the space

Find a table at a comfortable height. Prepare the space by setting out paper (A4 is a good size; coloured paper is fun), art materials (oil pastels, a box of water colours, markers, etc) and a pen and pencil. Leave the choice open as to whether the person may wish to paint, draw or write. Invite the person you are supporting to join you for the activity. If they are not interested at the time, leave it and try asking them again later.

2. Start from something not nothing

Provide objects such as shells, flowers, seeds or autumn leaves. Photos and picture books may also inspire. Place items within reach of the person. If need be, pick up an object yourself and hand it to them. You might like to tell them what it is, describe it, or prompt a memory they might have had with the object.

3. Help make the first marks

Be ready, if necessary, to help make the first marks on the paper. Keep your marks simple. If the person has been an artist, start with a small mark or shape. Otherwise draw a circle or another shape. Hand over the brush or oil pastel and let them make marks. Occasionally you may be asked to draw, say, a tree. Start the image so it is recognisable and again hand over the pastel.

4. Take dictation

If your friend or relative wants to express themselves by talking about a topic, take dictation. Read out what you have written. You are helping their brain recall how to write. Hand the pen over after a few sentences.

5. Duets can be fun

Start by making an image of a happy time you spent together. Hand the oil pastel or pencil over to your friend or relative and encourage them to draw something that they remember.

6. Treat whatever is produced with respect

Artwork is an expression of your friend or relative's creative being. Ask them to sign it. Mount it on coloured paper or laminate it. Photocopy the image and turn it into a card to send to other family members. Or perhaps frame it and give it to a grandchild.

7. Respect all creative work

All attempts should be welcomed. If you do not understand the image, admire the colours or the patterns. If words are misspelled do not correct them. Try and imagine what the word might be. Do not correct memories you remember differently. Treat stories as works of the imagination. Read texts aloud.

How carers can be creative

Providing support to others can sometimes be challenging. You could benefit from nurturing your own creative needs too. It can be difficult helping someone else be creative, if you have no opportunity to be creative yourself.

1. Set up a space for yourself

When you have short breaks during the day, set up a space with the materials laid out. Have a pen, notebook and oil pastels or paints ready and some quality paper. Choose somewhere comfortable.

2. Catch creative minutes

Don't wait for a creative moment – any moment can be creative. Trust your hand and your imagination. Leave your creative work out so that you can come back to it.

3. A daily ritual

Try making art a daily activity to help nurture yourself.

4. Give yourself small treats

Treat yourself to new materials – a pen that writes smoothly or oil pastels in new colours. Small gifts are a way of respecting yourself.

5. Respect your creative work

No creative act is wasted. Don't tear up your work – use it in later works. Try putting together a collage of 'failed' images or add phrases to later pieces of writing.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at **dementia.org.au**



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**