

Activities at home

Getting started and environment

Guidance for those who support people living with dementia

This information sheet has been written in partnership with occupational therapists and provides practical advice to help you support a person to engage in their hobbies and interests. If you need more information, please call our 24 hour Freephone Dementia Helpline on 0808 808 3000 and we will do our very best to help you.



While there are many benefits to taking part in activities, it is recognised that it isn't always easy for people to make the first move and get started. There could be many reasons why someone does not want to take part in an activity. This could include low motivation as a result of poor mood, pain, fear of failure or not understanding what is being asked.

It is important to make sure that any activities you are trying are person-centred, are matched to the person's interests and abilities and are enjoyable. When thinking about carrying out an activity, make sure that your environment can make this as easy as possible.

Here are some ideas which might help you to engage someone in activities:



Start small

Meaningful activities don't have to be big or complicated. They can be something small and carried out as part of an existing routine to make it more enjoyable for the person. For example, singing together while attending to personal care is a straightforward, easy way to enjoy an otherwise mundane activity.



Match to ability

Consider the person's current abilities when thinking about a meaningful activity to take part in. Things like how long can they concentrate for, are there any sensory challenges (make sure to wear glasses or a hearing aid if needed) or are there any physical issues (how long can the person stand for) will make an impact on the person's ability to participate. You might help by demonstrating the activity in short stages or steps. You can back this up with written or pictorial instructions. Using technology such as YouTube tutorials or online sessions and groups can also help with this.



Gain interest

It may be that if you ask someone if they would like to carry out a specific activity, they will say no. If that happens, you could try starting the activity yourself. For example, doing a jigsaw or a puzzle where you talk about what you are doing. The person may enjoy watching what you are doing (a meaningful activity in itself) or even better may naturally join in.



Positive feedback

We all respond well when we are encouraged, so it is important to ensure that positive feedback is provided. This can be incorporated during the activity, rather than feedback based on the standard of any end product. It can help if a person feels that they are doing something for someone else, such as making a card or painting for a family member. You could both share photos of the person taking part in activities with family members and friends.

Setting up an activity

Some activities will require preparation and it will be useful to have all the materials ready at the beginning. For example, to develop a "life story" where you share stories of past experiences, interests, who and what is important, it can be helpful to gather together items such as photographs, postcards and tickets etc.

Also think about a specific activity area. For example, moving away from the usual armchair to a good sized table or another setting if possible. Perhaps you could use a specific room to try to replicate the previous act of going somewhere for an activity.

If possible try leaving activities out so that they can be seen. For example you could:

- Leave the dishes on the drainer with a dish towel nearby
- Have a jigsaw in progress where the person will walk past
- Set up some jobs within the garden such as a watering can for plants.

Base the activity on what you know will be enjoyed, start small and focus on the enjoyment of taking part in an activity rather than the end result and have fun.

Helpful links

www.connectingpeopleconnectingsupport.online - This is an interactive website created by Occupational Therapists and designers where people can come together to explore ways to live well with dementia. There are 32 different topics with things to chat about, try, play and more!

Royal College of Occupational Therapy Activity in Care Homes Toolkit offers best practice in supporting older people to enjoy daily activities:

www.rcot.co.uk/about-occupational-therapy/living-well-care-homes-2019/a-z-activities

Digital Pool Activity Level guide supports people to be fully engaged in activities and describes how to support the person. You can download a free copy here <https://www.qcs.co.uk/digital-pal-instrument/?random>

