

Sensory Activities

Do you remember “Skokiaan?” It was originally recorded by the Bulawayo Sweet Rhythm Band. **Wikipedia:** Within a year of its 1954 release in South Africa, at least 19 cover versions of "Skokiaan" appeared. The [Rhodesian](#) version reached No 17 in the United States, while a [cover version](#) by [Ralph Marterie](#) climbed to No. 3. All versions combined propelled the tune to No. 2 on the *Cash Box* charts that year. Its popularity extended outside of music, with several urban areas in the United States taking its name. Artists who produced their own interpretations include [The Four Lads](#), [Louis Armstrong](#), [Bill Haley](#), [Herb Alpert](#), [Brave Combo](#), [Hugh Masekela](#) and [Kermit Ruffins](#). Herb Alpert released his popular version in 1978.



Auditory activity: Type “Skokiaan” in your search engine and then click on the YouTube Bulawayo version. When you have heard that, click on the **Kupira Marimba** version to see five young people having a blast making beautiful music. Your family member will be tapping his toes. This music expresses joy.

Olfactory activity: Has it been a while since you organized your spices? Put them all out on the kitchen table and tell your family member you need help. (Hide the pepper and spice that might irritate.) As you check for expiration dates, have your family member smell the spices and tell you what foods that come to mind.



Tactile activity: You probably have lots of lotions. Have your family member lie on a bed and massage his legs and feet from the knees down. Turn on the person’s favorite soothing music to make it a multi-sensory experience. Be attuned to any discomfort. Many elderly people have painful areas in their legs.

Tactile, visual activity with reminiscence: You probably have at least a drawer of embroidered pillowcases or crocheted antimacassars. My family called them doilies. No doubt they were made by your grandmother or great-grandmother. If you have some handed down by your spouse’s family, that’s even better. If you are like me, your children have already said they don’t “need them.” Now is the time to take them out and enjoy them and honor the ladies who created them with so much love and devotion. Turn the embroidery over and show your loved one the stitches, point out that when they made their textile artworks, polyester blends had not been invented so pillow cases were made of 100% rough cotton that had to be starched and pressed with a hot iron. Your spouse may remember his mother or grandmother crocheting, tating, or quilting.



Olfactory activity: I think every caregiver needs a bread maker for the wonderfully calming effect of the smell of bread baking and the anticipation it creates. The smell of chocolate chip cookies baking has the same effect, but bread bakes for several hours and the cookies bake in minutes. So, go with the bread!

Tactile activity: Hold that full body hug for 15 seconds 4 to 6 times a day and you’ll be rewarded immediately with a rush of oxytocin. It may even lengthen your life because of the favorable effect it has on your immune system.



Stress reduction activity: If you are giving care to someone who suffers from anxiety or insomnia, about 15 minutes before bedtime, turn the lights low. Put on some calming music, sit her in a comfortable chair, and just ask her to breathe deeply (see next page). For an older person, this simple breathing technique is much better than complicated breathing exercises, I think. No need to try to meditate—just listen to the music and breathe deeply.

This breathing exercise can be used any time your family member gets anxious