

The Gathering place

Interfaith Ministries

Grad School, Part 3

COMMUNICATION WITH A PERSON WITH DEMENTIA;
ACTIVITIES THAT EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE
PARTICIPANTS; WHAT WORKS; WHAT DOESN'T

Activity Goals at Gatherings

- To ENGAGE the participant and enhance her self esteem
- To reduce frustration, agitation, anxiety, depression of the participant
- To provide an opportunity for interaction with age-mates
- To provide an opportunity for volunteers to offer companionship to participants
- To maintain participants' mental acuity, flexibility, strength, and endurance, and to improve those functions when possible
- To send them back to their homes less agitated, feeling good about themselves, so that caregiver's challenges will be lessened

Methods:

Stimulation

Affirmation

Reassurance

Our participants should thrive in our care, and they will if we stimulate and affirm them.

Start at registration! Let them “run a gauntlet” of hugs. Ideally, a volunteer should accompany the participant to the table, offer a beverage, and start chatting with them. From that point on, they should never be left alone.

Volunteers and participants should be seated in such a way that they can interact.

Any conversation at a table should ALWAYS include the participant.

Between activities, engage them in conversation.

People who have AD do not want our sympathetic kindness; they want someone to:

- Pay attention to them
- Spend time with them
- Listen to their stories with interest
- Ask them questions about their stories
- Tell them they are looking great
- Touch them appropriately
- Smile and care

...exactly what everyone wants.

Skin is the body's largest organ

The stress hormone cortisol is reduced by hugging. Being hugged for 20 seconds boosts levels of oxytocin...

- Improving heart function
- Immune system is boosted, improving health and healing
- Blood pressure may be lowered
- Self-esteem and sense of well-being are improved

Touch is healing! Remember to hug! It's therapeutic for volunteers as well.

Communication: Much more than just talking

- Use a positive, open, friendly expression
- Keep good eye contact with a smile on your face and in your eyes
- Be aware of your stance to avoid sending a negative message. Leaning against the wall with your arms folded may be interpreted by a participant that you are bored or angry.
- If you don't know the person well, best conversation starters include growing up, school days, food, holidays, firsts, and favorites.

During a Gathering, go live in the participant's world

- Never argue with a person who has dementia. Logic will not work and the person will become confused and agitated. Instead, agree with the individual and then redirect and refocus their attention.
- Go live in THEIR world—do not try to reorient the demented person into YOUR world.
- Try to leave your own problems and anxieties at the door of the Fellowship Hall so you can offer your loving, undivided attention to the person in your care. Centering prayer may help you accomplish that.
- Anxiety is contagious. If you are distressed, a participant will pick up on that.

What causes agitation in a participant?

About half of all Alzheimer's patients will suffer from agitation at some point. It is most often caused by an imbalance in brain chemistry which affects impulse control. Rule out discomfort (room temperature too cold or hot, tight clothing) and pain, which may cause distress.

If agitation causes the person to pace, then walk with her.

If the agitated person has an emotional outburst or exhibits signs of verbal or physical aggression, call her caregiver. An episode of violence would be disturbing to our participants and volunteers.

When a participant is agitated

Using a low voice and touch to calm, talk with the person, calling her by name frequently. Hold hands or rub her back or shoulders.

If she appears to be overstimulated, move her to the edge of the group and sit with her.

If she is repeating “I want to go home” or exhibiting obsessive behavior, pull her up and hug her. Reassure her calmly that she is OK. Repeat to her that she is safe, that she is going to be alright.

When she is calm, use some lotion on her hands and forearms. Get her to talk by asking questions about her youth.

Required activities for Gatherings

- Music
- Reminiscing
- Arts and Crafts
- Exercise/physical movement
- Games/bingo

These activities have been established in clinical trials to improve cognitive function and enhance mood. For optimum results, participants should be engaged in every activity.

Optional activities: Devotionals and reading or telling stories (most effective with props and gestures); performances

Exercise and physical activity

- If participants are physically capable, attempt to have them on their feet about one hour during a 4-hour Gathering. That may include exercise, standing during a Pledge of Allegiance or a song, walking to the bathroom, playing a game like bowling, doing an after-lunch Conga Line, dancing, or standing and holding hands for the Lord's Prayer.
- Depending on the fitness and fall risk of the participant, that may not always be possible, but that should be a goal.
- This is especially helpful if the participant is sundowning.

Music: More than just sing-alongs

- Sing-alongs are the most effective music activity when participants are familiar with the songs, but you can also incorporate music into memory and reminiscing activities—finishing lines, Table Talk, discussing “oldies”, name that tune.
- Incorporate music with physical activities—dance, stretching, Zumba, acting out songs like B-I-N-G-O.
- It’s OK to offer two or even three music elements in a Gathering. Participants will enjoy them all!

Memory recall activities

TABLE TALKS AND GROUP FUN

- Down on the Farm
- School days
- First girl/boyfriend/car
- Favorite sport
- Preparing food
- Mother, Father, Grandparents
- Employment and military service

OPPORTUNITIES TO CREATE JOYFUL MOMENTS

- On the playground
- Hobbies, tools
- Favorite movie stars, colors, desserts, fruit
- Siblings, pets
- Holidays
- Gardening
- What's in a hamburger?

Arts and Crafts: OT without the big price tag

- Clip from magazines
- Color
- Drawing
- Make a card
- Decorate cookies
- Make paper airplanes
- Decorate a pumpkin
- Decorate paper bags
- Trace leaves
- Finger paint
- Make a picture frame
- Clip coupons
- Pot a plant
- Plant seeds
- Make a collage
- Make a bird feeder with pinecones and peanut butter

Devotionals address spiritual needs

- Devotionals should never be disturbing to Alzheimer's patients. The most effective devotionals are usually about God's love and gratitude.
- Devotionals should be prepared by the minister or a designee. They should:
 - be very simple—something like a children's story
 - delivered in a low, loud voice, and slower than average speech
 - the person delivering the devotional should keep good eye contact with participants
 - the person delivering the devotional should be entertaining and use gestures and props
 - devotionals should not be more than 4-5 minutes

Reading stories takes talent

- The ONLY successful way to read a story to the group is to: Ham it up!
- You MUST be LOUD and THEATRICAL to hold the attention of Alzheimer's patients.

Smiling and gesturing

Engaging the group—perhaps asking questions or asking for involvement. Keep the story line simple and keep it SHORT. Props can help.

The two most difficult activities to keep a participant engaged are story telling and devotionals.

Alzheimer's patients can understand you if you speak slowly, to allow them more time to process what you are saying.

Games—fun for all!

Volunteers should get into the act!

- Hold competitions—horseshoe, bowling, croquet, golf (lightweight equipment), ball/bean bag tosses, relays, paper plane contests, hula hoop, bounce beach balls, have balloon races.
- Match—celebrities with their names, singers with their songs.
- Identify household objects in a bag.
- Name foods that start with an “A” or “B”.
- Separate pictures by animal, mineral or plant.
- Fill in the blanks _____; finish the saying _____

Bingo! Call LOUDLY

- Call Bingo slowly and repeat—see if everyone has had time to find their number.
- Best Bingo prizes are fruit, cereal bars, and peanut butter crackers. Word search books, personal care items, socks/scarves are good. Remember their personal space may be minimal.
- Each ministry may decide the length of Bingo—30 minutes to maximum one hour.
- Volunteers may play Bingo, but they may not claim prizes even when they plan to give it to a participant.
- Everyone can be a winner! (Don't clear cards, keep track to ensure all win at least once.)

Transitioning

- Allow time for participants to transition from one activity to another to keep them from becoming fatigued, overwhelmed, or confused. If they have just completed a physical exercise and are returning to their seats, let them “settle down.”
- This is a good time for volunteers to initiate conversations and to engage the participant one-on-one. A smiling volunteer who is paying attention to a participant is creating an emotional connection...there isn't much that we do that is better than that!
- The person who is scheduled to lead the next activity should watch to see if participants who are all back at their tables are engaged in conversation. If they are, wait several minutes to start your next activity.

What NOT to do during activities

- Do anything for the participant that she can do for herself, however it isn't uncommon for people to forget how to eat. In that case, we help them hold cutlery.
- Chat unnecessarily with other volunteers. If you want to chat, by all means, do so—just go to the kitchen and grab a cup of coffee when you're not needed.
- Assume a bored or distracted look—participants may think you are angry or upset with them. Keep smiling and keep good eye contact.
- Mind your body language and your tone of voice—the participant may think you are upset or don't want to be there with them.

What TO do during activities

- Keep smiling, look interested, and use appropriate touch.
- Congratulate the participant on a job well done or a great attempt! Call the person by name frequently and find something that you can genuinely compliment them on.
- Between activities, engage them in conversation at the table. Offer water often unless there is some reason we should not.
- Watch to see that no one wanders! Watch to see if people who are at risk of falling look unsteady. Watch participants to make sure they are engaged. Report to your Team Leader if you don't think an activity engaged the participant.

Gathering Place Advisory Councils

Take operations problems and suggestions to your quarterly Advisory Council. In an emergency, call your Council Chairs.

The Gathering Place Advisory Councils are the North and South County groups of Team Leaders and Volunteers at Large who meet quarterly to guide operations of the Gathering Place respite program. Each ministry should be represented at every Council meeting.

It is a democratic process, with each ministry and each active V@L attending getting one vote.

All interested active volunteers may attend Advisory Council meetings.

Grad School Part 3 Quiz

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