I consider myself a true visualist. As long as I can remember I have always placed emphasis on what visually stimulates me; vivid colors, shapes, coloring books, nature, movies, television, clothes, make-up, decorating, photographs, paintings, graphics, and the list goes on and on. I ended up marrying a photographer and became a partner in our commercial photography business for 23 years. All that being said, I am excited about writing an article for this month’s Online Dementia Journal since it relates to the occipital lobe - vision.

My intention is to share ideas on how to use photographs to engage a person living with dementia. Photographs can spark emotions and memories or tell a story. The fact of the matter is that visual aids, especially photos, can help stir positive emotions, promote conversation, and reduce social isolation and depression for someone living with dementia. A photograph can play a key role in starting a conversation and allowing them to reminisce about pleasant times in their lives, which is why a picture can be worth a thousand words.

Let’s take a look at a few ways that families and care partners can use photos to create opportunities to connect:

**Visiting a Gallery or History Museum.** Great places to view photos of nature, landscapes, places visited, local and regional landmarks, and historical events to name a few. This works well for people who love to garden, be outdoors, travel, or reminisce about the good ‘ole days. A great outing that could include lunch or ice cream afterwards.

**Building a Scrapbook that is meaningful together.** Scrapbooking is a way for people living with dementia to focus on a task which is relaxing and rewarding. Pasting, writing, applying stickers, and using scissors promotes hand-eye coordination, and to some it is just plain ‘ole fun. Using copies or printouts of photographs (especially old ones) or newspaper clippings, prevents originals from getting damaged or lost. Enlarging photos in order to see them better and using plastic protective sheets over each page will help preserve them and can withstand a lot of use.
Creating a Photo Album. Reviewing photos of past events can be a great aid to stimulating memories and conversation with a person living with dementia. It can help to provide comfort and joy, as well as reduce depression. It can be rewarding to use photographs of their life, family, and events. Even if the person living with dementia cannot participate verbally it can still give them pleasure to be involved in reflections on their past. Using large photos of people’s faces will help the person to see the photos better along with making easier recognition of the person in the photo. Given the technology we have today, photos can easily be scanned, enlarged, and printed. Using an album with plastic page covers helps protect the photos and can withstand a lot of use. Writing short descriptions and/or the person’s name beside the photo can be helpful.

Try taking photographs together. If you can find a simple, one-click digital camera, the person you are partnering with might be able to take photographs of things that give them pleasure in their environment. There is then the fun of looking at them on a bigger screen and then making choices of which ones would be nice to print and add to an album you are creating.

Check out the articles below for some good how to tips on using photos to connect and engage.

Alzheimer’s & Dementia Weekly: 10 Ways to Use the Power of Photos for Dementia Care

6 Best Ways to Stimulate Memories through Photos

Mary has been working in senior care, specializing in dementia, for 10 years. She is a PAC Certified Independent Trainer and Certified Dementia Practitioner. Working for Senior Helpers, an in-home care company, for five years provided her the opportunity to start sharing Teepa’s philosophies and care techniques. During that time her mother was diagnosed with vascular dementia and eight years later, so was her father. Being actively involved in their care provided Mary first-hand care partner experience adding to her knowledge base. Realizing dementia education is greatly needed for families, she became a Support Group Facilitator for the Alzheimer’s Association in 2012. Continuing to grow her skills, she became certified and went to work for Positive Approach to Care (PAC) in 2015. Working with Teepa and her amazing team is extremely rewarding and fulfills another one of her career goals.