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Making Moments of Joy
for Those Living with Dementia

Four Truths About Dementia:
1. At least 2 parts of the brain are dying - one related to memory and another part
2. It is chronic – can’t be fixed
3. It is progressive – it gets worse
4. It is terminal – it will kill, eventually

Beliefs:
People living with dementia are doing the best they can
We must learn to dance with our partner
What we choose to do matters
We are a key to making life worth living
We must be willing to change ourselves
How Can We Help?
- Let go of the past to be in the moment
- Go with their flow
- Be willing to try something new
- Be willing to learn something different
- Be willing to see it through another’s eyes
- Be willing to fail and try again
- Be a detective, not a judge
- Match your help to their remaining abilities
- Look, listen, offer, think

What Does it Take to Have a Day with Meaning and Joy?

Key Activities to Consider:
- Productive - Work
- Enjoyment - Leisure
- Wellness - Personal Care
- Restorative - Rest
Productive Activities:

Helping another person
Helping family members/caregivers
Completing community tasks
Making something
Sorting things
Fixing things
Building things
Creating something
Caring for things

Counting things
Folding things
Marking things
Cleaning things
Taking things apart
Moving things
Cooking/baking
Setting up/breaking down
Other ideas

Leisure Activities:

Active:
Socials
Sports
Games
Dancing
Singing
Visiting
Hobbies
Doing, talking, looking

Passive:
Entertainers
Sport program/event
Presenters
Living room or lobby sitting
TV programs: watched
Activity watchers
Being done to

Self-Care and Wellness Activities:

Cognitive:
Table top tasks:
• Matching, sorting, organizing, playing
Table top games:
• Cards, board games, puzzles
Group games:
• Categories, crosswords, word play, old memories

Physical:
Exercise
Walking
Strengthening tasks
Coordination tasks
Balance tasks
Flexibility tasks
Aerobic tasks
Personal care tasks
Rest and Restorative Activities:

- Sleep/naps
- Listen to quiet music with lights dimmed
- Look at the newspaper
- Look at a calm video on TV screen
- Rock in a chair
- Swing in a porch swing
- Walk outside
- Listen to reading from a book of faith
- Listen to poetry or stories
- Listen to or attend a worship service
- Stroke a pet or animal
- Stroke fabric
- Get a hand or shoulder massage
- Get a foot soak and rub
- Listen to wind chimes
- Aromatherapy

Positive Action Starters:

- **Help**: Be sure to compliment his or her skill in this area, then ask for help with something
  
  “You are so good at baking, would you please help me?”

- **Try**: Hold up or point to the item you would like to use, possibly sharing in the dislike of the item or task
  
  “Could we just try this?”

- **Choice**: Try using visual cues to offer two possibilities or one choice with something else as the other option
  
  “This, or that?”

- **Short and Simple**: Give only the first piece of information, maybe offer a time frame of 1-5 minutes
  
  “It’s about time to brush teeth.”

- **Step by Step**: Only give a small part the task at first
  
  “Lean forward.”

How Does Skill Change Over Time With Dementia?

- Interests
- Helper cues that help
- Environmental cues that help
- Ability to focus and change focus
- Sensory awareness and processing
- Motor skills: gross and fine
- Decision making and reasoning
Two Examples:

Paying Bills:
- Do it independently
- Together – use a calculator
- Together – do all of them
- Together – do one at a time
- You do most, they sign and put in envelopes
- You do all but the signature
- They put on stamps
- Both take them to the mailbox

Washing Dishes:
- Do it independently
- Only after meals
- Do it independently – when needed to fill time
- Together – one wash one dry
- Do parts
- Watch and guide
- Carry dishes to/from sink

Two Options:

Doing:
- Filling socks: rice socks, bean socks, corn socks
- Adding herbs: lavender, citrus, eucalyptus, mint
- Putting a sock inside another sock
- Heating the socks
- Rubbing the socks over muscles
- Emptying socks out

Making:
- Fruit salad: from fresh fruit
- Fruit salad: from canned fruit
- Fruit salad: from pre-cut fruit
- Fruit salad: one fruit and yogurt
- Fruit salad: dried fruit, granola, and yogurt
- Putting the fruit salad in small cups or bowls
- Serving the fruit salad

The GEMS® Progression of Dementia:

Sapphires: True Blue – Slower but Fine
Diamonds: Repeats and Routines, Cutting
Emeralds: Going – Time Travel – Where?
Ambers: In the Moment – Sensations
Rubies: Stop and Go – Big Movements
Pearls: Hidden in a Shell - Immobile
Finding Joy for Diamonds:
- What they feel competent at
- What they enjoy
- Who they like
- What makes them feel valued
- Where they feel comfortable but stimulated
- What is familiar but intriguing
- What is logical and consistent with historic values and beliefs
- Whoever is in charge

Finding Joy for Emeralds:
- Doing familiar tasks
- Doing visible tasks
- Historic tasks and people and places
- Engaging with or helping others
- Finding important people or things
- Having a ‘job’ or ‘purpose’
- Being an ‘adult’
- Getting finished and doing something else

Finding Joy for Ambers:
- Things to mess with (may be people!)
- Places to explore
- Stuff to take, eat, handle, move
- Visually interesting things
- People who look or sound interesting, or places that are quiet and private
- Textures, shapes, movement, colors, numbers, stacking, folding, sorting
Finding Joy for Rubies:
- Walking a routine path
- Going forward
- Watching others
- Being close or having space
- Things to pick up, hold, carry, push, wipe, rub, grip, squeeze, pinch, slap
- Things to chew on, suck on, grind
- Rhythmic movements and actions

Finding Joy for Pearls:
- Pleasant and familiar sounds and voices
- Warmth and comfort
- Soft textures
- Pleasant smells
- ‘Good’ tastes
- Smooth and slow movement
- ‘Just right’ touch and feel

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