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The Holidays
When Dementia is Involved

Tips for Holidays:
Celebrate, don’t elaborate!

Beliefs:
- People living with dementia are doing the best they can
- Learn to dance with our partners
- Be the key to make life worth living
- What we choose to do matters
- Be willing to change ourselves
- Be willing to stop and back off and try again
Positron Emission Tomography (PET)
Dementia Progression vs. Normal Brains

Five Ss for the Holiday Celebrations:
- Keep it Short: try 5-10 minutes
- Make it Simple: simplify the activity or the event, but don’t make it babyish
- Create the Space: eliminate distractors and put it into the schedule
- Sensory rich: matching sensory preferences, tolerances, dislikes
- Satisfying for each of you: physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually
What Can I Use?
Five Options:
Pick One or a Combination
- People
- Animals
- Places
- Props
- Music/Rhythm

Pre-Holiday:
Think about the person living with dementia:
- Awareness of the holiday or event
- Past engagement with the holiday or event:
  pleasures, jobs, roles, emotions, values, people
- What type of dementia does the person have?
- Where in the condition’s progression are they?
- What else needs to happen for you?
- Who is the holiday or event for?
- How are they doing with surprises or changes?

Pre-Holiday:
- Review possible songs and music for the event
- Gather props
- Consider history related to the event
- Think through options to offer
- Keep it simple!
- Breathe!
Songs:
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JIEpWhBwXo
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mN7LW0Y00kE
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyvLzB_sU8U
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5G3Vclp6Y8
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L2MADFWeoOI
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AL0t0lO7L_I
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NSQLMPUK-8

Holidays with Dementia:
- It’s about Process, not Product
- It’s about Quality Time, not Length of Time
- It’s about Moments of Joy, not Whole-Visit Joy

Use Basic Skills:
- Positive Physical Approach™
- Supportive Communication
- Consistent and Skill-Sensitive Cues:
  - Visual, Verbal, Physical
- Hand-under-Hand®:
  - For connection
  - For assistance
- Open and Willing Heart, Head and Hands
Positive Physical Approach™:
- Pause at edge of public space (6 feet)
- Greet with your open hand next to your face, smile
- Call the person by name, if possible
- Move your hand into handshake position
- Approach slowly and within visual range
- Move from a handshake to Hand-under-Hand® position
- Shift into a Supportive Stance on their side
- Get low by standing or kneeling, but don’t lean in
- Make a connection and wait for their response

Hand-under-Hand® Position:

To Connect:
- Identify a common interest
- Say something nice about the person
- Share something about yourself and encourage the person to share back
- Follow their lead and listen actively
- Use some of their words to keep the flow going
- Remember it’s the ‘first time’ for them so expect repeats
- Use the phrase “Tell me about...”
- Keep memories positive, if possible
**To Connect:**

Later in the disease:
- Use props or objects
- Consider parallel engagement at first:
  - Look at something and be interested together, share it
  - Talk less, wait longer, take turns, cover don’t confront when you aren’t getting their words, just enjoy the exchange
- Use automatic speech and social patterns to start interactions
- Keep it short and emphasize the visual

**To Encourage Them to Do Something:**

- Use visual (gesture/point) combined with verbal:
  - “It’s about time for dinner…”
  - “Let’s go this way…”
  - “Here are your shoes…”
- Don’t ask questions you don’t want to hear the answer to
- Acknowledge the response/reaction to your information
- Limit your words and keep it simple
- Wait for them to process the information

**If They Become Distressed, Use Supportive Communication:**

- Repeat a few of their words with a question at the end
- Avoid confrontational questions
- Use just a few words
- Go slow
- Use examples
- Fill in the blanks
- Listen, then offer empathy: “Sounds like…” or “Seems like…” or “Looks like…”
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

GEMS and Holidays:

Sapphires: May go slower or do less, but fine
Diamonds: Use old rituals and known info
Emeralds: Smaller, shorter, visual, simpler
Ambers: Moments, sensory, songs, 1:1 to 1:3
Rubies: Songs, walks, stories, food, scents
Pearls: Touches, music, smells, tastes, love

Tips For Holidays:

• Keep gatherings smaller and visits shorter
• Offer time-outs for family members, take breaks
• Make a list of pleasures to do
• Encourage visitors to understand before they begin interacting
• Encourage going out and doing something fun together rather than just talking, if possible
• Bring old pictures, old familiar items or props, and be prepared to reminisce about old times
**Tips For Holidays:**
- Consider cutting back on traditions if they seem distressing.
- Help by introducing visitors or family members them with some orienting information, if they forget to do so.
- Get some exercise and take care of your own stress levels.
- Get a friend to help the person with dementia select gifts, shop, or do something special for loved ones, including you!

**Tips For Holidays:**
- Don’t correct errors, just go with the flow of the conversation.
- Be prepared to hear old stories over and over.
- Use old pictures or props to bring up other old memories, laugh and enjoy.
- Accept ‘general’ comments, don’t push for specifics.
- If the person says something distressing or seems worried about something, realize it may not be true - however, they are not lying to you, their brain is lying to them.

Use empathy and go with the flow!