

ACTIVITY KITS

The following Activity Kits have been assembled for the purpose of spending one-on-one time with a person who had dementia or Alzheimer's disease. These kits can bring a sense of well-being to a person who may struggle with interacting in a large group.

Color Code:

Green	Appropriate for early stages of dementia
Yellow	Appropriate for the middle stages
Red	Appropriate for the later stages, where a person has more difficulty finishing tasks.

Earring, Cuff Links or Button Match

This activity has become a favorite of those persons with even progressed dementia because the person becomes very involved in finding the matching earring to the pair. This kit involves approximately 10-12 pairs of earrings. These earrings were found at garage sales or around home and are quite unique looking. The volunteer/staff person lays out one of each pair in a row in front of the client. The box with the matching earring is then handed to the client to make the matches. This helps to develop hand-eye coordination and can also stimulate long-term memory. This is a good time to reminisce about the past or just visit with the person. Praise and encouragement help to bring about big smiles for their accomplishment.

Bead Stringing

This kit includes several different colored beads and strings. The strings are either plastic or a heavier shoestring-like thickness. The dementia patient is asked to make a string of pink beads, for example. They need to find the correct color and then string them together. We, as volunteers, always try to give them a reason why we are asking them to do these activities. For example, we might be working on these to give to a children's home, etc. This activity stimulates the mind and improves finger dexterity. A feeling of accomplishment is given to the person who can string several beads together. One of the clients was so happy that she could help.

Card Lacing

To promote a sense of order and pattern, this kit was included. This idea is basic to giving a person a sense of well-being and order in his or her life. The kit includes different shapes of foam sheet cutouts that have been hole punched for lacing. The client is given one of these shapes and laces it around the edges, for example. The Volunteer/Staff person may lace one for the client as an example to match. This example stimulates eye-hand coordination and may take extra time to accomplish but gives the person satisfaction in completing a project.

Clay for Molding and Mixing

This kit exercises the muscles of the hand and develops hand-eye coordination. During the activity one can also have a discussion of primary and secondary colors. This kit contains several different colors of clay and cutouts (similar to cookie cutouts). Begin by sorting the primary colors from the secondary colors. Leading the discussion on what constitutes a secondary color; show the client how to make a secondary color by blending two primary colors. Use marble sized pieces of clay and have the client squeeze them together to make a new color. The cutouts are used to make different shapes after rolling out the clay, similar to making roll-out cookies. This activity stimulates the creativity of the clients, and we have seen such a look of accomplishment on their faces upon completion.

Button Sorting

We found some really colorful buttons that we thought would be great for sorting and also for using for some of our other crafts. We have noticed that the persons with dementia really concentrate on trying to sort three or four of the different colors, and some take quite a while to think of which kinds they are sorting. One of our clients was so happy to be able to sort these out for us and be of help. Through her smile we could see that she had a feeling of accomplishment.

Tool Kit

This kit contains a hammer, flat head screwdriver, and a Phillips screwdriver with a board and some screws. This kit is a great tool to help clients reminisce about their occupations. The client also works with using fine motor skills to complete a task.

Foam Quilt Patterns

The idea of quilting came through in this kit, which challenges the client to create colorful patterns from flat foam pieces. The contrast in colors and shapes makes this a great way to have fun. The foam pieces can be arranged on a sheet of colored foam or construction paper to create a quilting pattern.

Letters for Spelling or Numbers for Sorting

We have purchased a box full of colorful letters and numbers for sorting or spelling certain words. This is not for those whose dementia has progressed, but we have found that those people who think they cannot spell a word are surprised when they find out that they really can. One individual was doing so well that she did not want to stop when it was coffee time, but wanted to keep trying. These are things that give the client so much satisfaction. These letters can also be used for sorting out all of one type of letter. It is also a time for just visiting while being together.

Items Pertaining to the Beach

This has become a really fun kit. We have come up with a beach bag containing several items one has at the beach. Each bag contains sunglasses, suntan lotion, sun hat, seashells, and river rocks. The idea is to just have a good time trying on the sunglasses, etc., and to bring happiness to a person who has not experienced these things in a long time. We get a lot of smiles from the clients, and many will talk about some of the good times they had at the beach.

Cut-Outs

We have noticed that even with dementia, people can still cut out shapes of items on a sheet of paper. It is amazing how carefully they still do this. For this reason, we thought that some colorful construction paper with basic shapes drawn on in marker (easy to see) would be something that they would enjoy doing. They will always give you a big smile when you compliment them on how well they did.

Fold Clothes

One of our clients becomes very agitated after lunch. We have noticed that she will fold washcloths and towels for quite a while and really does a good job. A kit has been put together for this purpose. When she starts to wander, we present her with the bin of clothes to fold, and this makes her feel that she is being useful. When we show her our appreciation, she will give us a big smile.

Puzzles

Our puzzles have been made with heavy-weight pictures from calendars mounted on foam sheets with adhesive backing on one side. We then cut the pictures into about 10-12 pieces. Clients always seem to want to do more than one puzzle. This is good for eye-hand coordination, and the clients really concentrate on the pieces to see which goes next to the other. The puzzles seem to bring the client satisfaction because they feel a sense of accomplishment after completing the puzzle. They will also comment on the pictures which bring back good memories and feelings.

Medallion Search

This was something we thought of to evaluate the finger dexterity of some of the clients. We have purchased a large bag of unpopped popcorn and put this into a shoe box container. We then placed six poker chips into the popcorn. The object is to have the person try to find the poker chips by feeling for the different shape, or by looking and feeling. The clients are agreeable to helping us find the poker chips we dropped in. One afternoon, it was time for everyone to have coffee and we had not found all the chips. The client made sure to tell me later that the next time she came, we would have to continue the search.

Scented Lotions

Our kit includes three bottles of different scented lotions. Sometimes we simply give hand massages to those who need to have special time spent with them. This is one of our best kits for visiting in combination with a relaxing stimulation. We are getting great responses with this one. The ladies really seem to enjoy the pampering. Smiles are really abundant.

Manicures

This kit contains several colors of polish, clippers, files, and everything else needed to give a person a manicure. Both men and women enjoy the time spent trimming and filing their nails. This activity helps to increase self esteem and gives clients an opportunity to socialize with others while receiving a needed service.

Knot Tying

This kit is designed to help those who can't keep their hands still. The client will tie knots and then untie them, or another client will untie the knots. This improves a client's strength and coordination and helps to calm an agitated client. The client can just sit and tie knots, or they can tie bows on a teddy bear or doll.

Fishing/Hunting

This activity is useful in reminiscing about past fishing or hunting trips and the "big one that got away". It includes fishing lures, bobbers, and worms (with the hooks removed), as well as pictures of fish, fishermen, deer, hunters, and other wildlife.

Activity Books to Use with Alzheimer's Disease

Keeping Busy...A Handbook of Activities for Persons with Dementia

James Dowling

Failure-Free Activities for the Alzheimer Patient: A Guidebook for Caregivers

Carmel B. Sheridan

Alzheimer's Disease: Activity-Focused Care

Carly R. Hellen

The Positive Interactions Program of Activities for People with Alzheimer's Disease

Sylvia Nissenboim, Christine Vroman