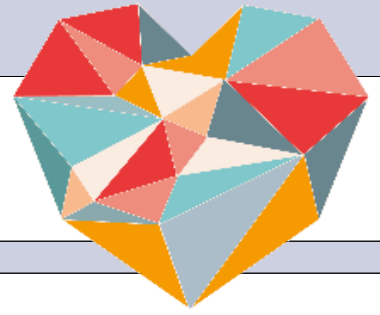


Meaningful activities for people living with dementia



Why are meaningful activities important?

People living with dementia have to deal continuously with losses in their cognitive abilities, and meaningful activities become a mean of maintaining the sense of identity through the habits and routines they have acquired throughout their lives. When performing routines, we don't have to think about how to do things, we just do the (thanks to procedural memory), so the tasks are no longer hard work and require much less effort to be done.

Someone with dementia might have difficulties in finding meaningful activities on their own, so it's especially important that the people and the environment around provide such opportunities.



What are the benefits of performing meaningful activities?

- Encourages the maintenance of personal identity.
- Facilitates decision-making and choice.
- Promotes participation and perception of belonging.
- Needs, likes and preferences are enhanced.
- Everyday activities are performed in real environments, which gives special meaning to the task, as opposed to "traditional" stimulation activities.
- Verbal communication is not always necessary, since the activities are known by the people and can easily act by imitation or in a very automatic way.
- Even if people do not engage directly in activities, they benefit from being part of an active and meaningful environment.



How to identify what is meaningful for each person?

- Deeply knowing each person: their present, past, hobbies, interests, likes and dislikes, preferences. It is all about knowing what is relevant, what that person wants to do and what brings well-being to each.
- What if the person cannot communicate, what is significant at this moment? Then, it will be our own creativity, common sense and ability to observe that will guide us to obtain this information.
- As a first approach, invite the person to observe and participate in activities, and pay attention to their reactions. Both verbal and non-verbal behaviour (gestures, gaze and facial expression) give us information about how the person feels.
- Try what you think might be relevant to that person based on what you know about him or her (environment, family, age, gender, profession, hobbies, or type of life they have led), and again carefully observe the person's reactions to the activity.
- By including people with dementia in this whole process, professionals and other community members become more aware of their needs and wishes. Including people with dementia also means empowering them, recognizing they are still part of the community.

