

4.1.3 Meaningful Life: making a contribution

Activism, research and influencing perceptions of dementia

For many people the experience of dementia can change the direction of their lives, and for some this introduces a new desire to explain their experience and change the way dementia is viewed. This can be seen through the ever-growing use of social media, books and experts by experience telling their stories. For others activism around subjects such as human rights or the environment may be a central to their identity. Within a care home setting opportunities to access the world through activism or being a part of research may be controlled by others and greatly diminished.



Quick Ideas

Social media, blogging, journalling or memoirs. These could use various forms of multimedia. Forms of activism such as petitions or writing to a local MP, council or organisation, might also be a valuable form of being involved in the community for some people.

Bigger ideas

Many organisations which support people with dementia either have or consult with expert by experience groups. For some the role of experts by experience is very meaningful. Experts by experience often offer advice or sometimes undertake roles presenting to audiences. Other subjects such as the environment, or pride marches may also be very important to someone.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

There are often opportunities for people with dementia to be involved in research. To help this, care homes can appoint a research coordinator who liaises with other organisations such as universities.

Internet access is something which is becoming more familiar for care home residents and a central part of many people's lives. It is important that care homes can support this. Assistance may be needed with technology such as facetime and emails.

Awareness of events such as marches or groups that the person can be involved if they wish, are an important factor in helping people living with dementia to remain involve. Likewise, the assumption by care staff and family that people may want to be involved in these things is essential.

Consent and data protection:

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See workbook for full details.

4.3.1 Supportive Environment: Bridging objects and subjects

Conversation starters and connectors

It can be challenging for people living with dementia to either start something or keep going- with an activity. Sometimes having a prompt will help to remind the person of what they are doing or talking about. It also gives opportunities for the person to take a break in the discussion which can allow time to process what has been said and reply. The purpose of this type of connector is to create a focus or bridge to strengthen engagement rather than to complete a task or activity. Bridging objects and subjects can be anything from an old photo, to a person, to a time of day. The bridge helps to either inspire an occupation or to prompt the person to carry on doing something.



Quick Ideas

Reminiscence activity packs are often useful for starting conversations. If a person picks an object up, then sit beside them and comment. Comments do not need to be direct questions; perhaps recall a story they have previously told you or discuss the object. Anything can act as a bridge. A physical thing can help to inspire someone to want to talk. Walking keeps someone involved by acting as the prompt but likewise a time of day might, walking alongside someone and talking can also work with their own motivation. Other physical activities such as watering the garden can help people to transition from one part of the day to the next.

Bigger ideas

Animals or robopets offer time to pause, and sensory stimulation without the requirement to remember anything. Animals can aid communication without the need for words through laughter, body language and touch.

Things to Consider:

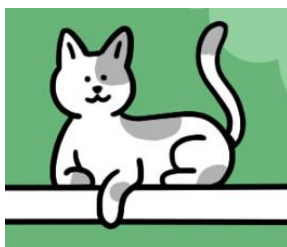
Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

A bridge can often be something outside the person. However sometimes it is a part of the environment such as a person's favourite chair, the kitchen or view. The occupation it inspires might be an obvious activity though could also be a moment of reflection or peace. The bridge acts as the structure needed for the person to experience something. Having objects around the building that are easily accessible and varied is useful though often the initial interaction may need to be started by another person, the object then helps to build and maintain the connection. Identifying these links to occupation can be challenging as they may change, however they can be very important for wellbeing and building a positive relationship.

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4.1.3 Meaningful life: Contributing on a personal level

Control of routine and structure of the day

Meaning can come from people feeling that they have control over how they live their lives. This might not be the big decisions, but the day-to-day small things. Making decisions even if somebody is not aware they are doing it can have a big impact on how people feel about themselves, and their subsequent levels of motivation. Decision making can be stressful so it might be useful to have prompts such as visual menus or limited choices to help making decisions to be more accessible for some people.



Quick Ideas

Deciding on clothes, food choices and when and where to eat or drink are important for some people. This can be supported by the environment.

Bigger ideas

Involving people in planning within the care home such as meal planning, planting in the garden, home decoration, health decisions such as smoking or sugary diet.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

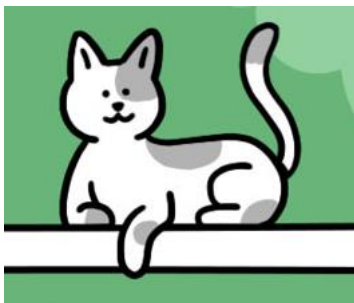
Free access to different areas such as bedrooms and outside space gives a feeling of control even when this might not be seen as desirable such as in the rain. Having coats by the door might be a way of making the outside environment more accessible without being cut short by discomfort or relying on others to have time to help.

Having areas for food preparation or drinks which are accessible and labelled can help initiate choice.

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4.2.3 Occupation as a means of assessment

Demonstrating abilities

People living with dementia can experience low expectations from other people. If people believe something is too challenging for the person with dementia this can lead to them unintentionally limiting the opportunity a person has to try. Completing activities can help the person living with dementia to demonstrate that they are still able to do things and may help to keep a sense of independence or support self-esteem.



Quick Ideas

Self-care can be supported but with elements that the person can do themselves.

Involvement in day-to-day activities such as meal preparation.

Bigger ideas

Formal assessments can be used to understand disease progression, but often things with personal significance, such as being able to write family birthday cards mean a great deal to people.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Having opportunity to demonstrate abilities is often controlled by other people in a care home setting. The intention of some care workers to protect people from seeing themselves no longer able to do things or failing, is from a positive place, though can reduce opportunity for people to try. Considering what steps could be put in place to support people living with dementia to try different activities such as labelling items, arranging things in order, or doing step-by-step guides or pictograms could help someone to achieve outcomes that would otherwise be challenging.

It can be very emotionally challenging for people with dementia to assess if they are still able to do things. Whilst it is important that people have the opportunity to experience a variety of emotions, including the feeling of frustration and grief if they perceive their dementia has progressed and they have lost skills, it is important to make sure that someone is available to support the person through these emotions, whether that be sitting and listening to their feelings and acknowledging them, or finding adaptations that might help in the future.

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4.2.1 Occupation as a tool to manage emotions and behaviour

Distraction

Occupation can be used to help distract somebody living with dementia from negative feelings or actions which are causing distress. It is a tool used by both people living with dementia and those who support them to improve wellbeing, however distraction is only effective if everyone wants the same outcome. The underlying reason for the original behaviour or emotion might not be addressed by distraction and then lead to tension and frustration for both the person living with dementia and their supporter.

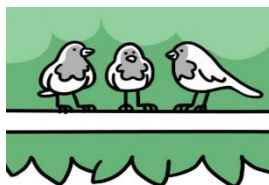


Quick Ideas

Asking someone to come and help with a job such as folding laundry, washing up or weeding. Asking the person for their opinion. Physical activity such as dancing or walking. Activities can release hormones to boost mood and help the person to manage their feelings in that moment.

Bigger ideas

Planning musical activities such as choir or instruments to coincide with times of day or events which cause people frustration. Working towards something such as meal preparation, writing or recording personal stories such as a memoir or local history can help to create a focus.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Leaving cleaning objects available such as dusters in a basket. 'Dip in' activities on tables for example trays of buttons or screws for sorting. The environment can be both a trigger for emotion and a means of distraction. Understanding what might cause somebody to feel distress or to want to distract themselves is a key part of understanding how to support them. An observation diary might help to identify clues in the patterns of people's behaviour if they are not able to explain how they feel.

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4.1.1 Living a meaningful life: a sense of normality

Enjoying group accomplishments

For many people the success of others can be very meaningful and create a feeling of shared success. An example of this might be the sports team they support winning, or a family member passing a qualification. Shared success may not need the person to do anything but can still create a strong emotion. It helps people to feel connected to others and can be a big part of someone's identity.



Quick Ideas

Watching sport together can create a sense of community, likewise, doing a shared activity such as creating art, games like seated skittles, being a part of a choir or baking together can lead to a sense of shared accomplishments.

Bigger ideas

A group challenge, for example a sponsored walk, allows each person to take on a little bit, be it a few meters on a treadmill, or even just watching others and cheering them on. Things like fundraising charts or a picture of how much has been completed can also help those unable to physically partake to feel that sense of accomplishment.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Sharing in other's accomplishments can require a larger amount of staff time and support, however displaying photos of achievements with a note explaining them can help to prompt conversation between people and build a sense of pride in their successes.

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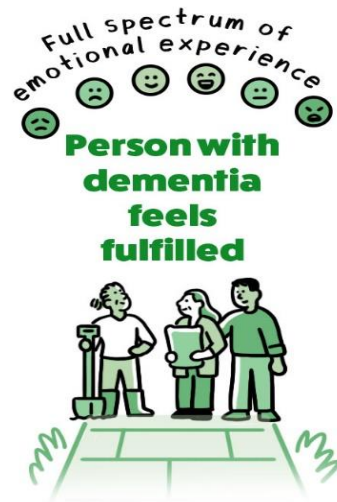
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4.1.2 Living a meaningful life: Full spectrum of emotional experience

Feeling calm

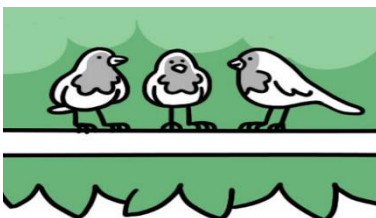
Feeling calm can be very meaningful for people living with dementia as a short-term period of rest and to feel restored. However, for many people long periods of rest or calm may not be meeting their needs. Prolonged periods of inactivity could lead to boredom. It is important to balance calmness with other emotions to help people to feel a sense of wholeness.



Quick Ideas

Sitting with a drink and chatting can help to restore calm.

Music can be used, though it is very personal and the person living with dementia should be the one to select the music.



Bigger ideas

For a deeper sense of tranquility people often enjoy yoga or guided meditation. Massage or hair styling can create a feeling of relaxation and release calming endorphins such as serotonin and dopamine.

Being in nature can create a sense of calmness. Sensory gardens with seating and dining areas create outdoor spaces that offer a sanctuary from busy rooms which can lead to people living with dementia feeling over stimulated or overwhelmed.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

What helps people to feel calm can be very personal though having areas which are quieter and more secluded can be helpful. Likewise preparing a box or small selection of personal things such as photos, preferred music or even a blanket offers quick prompts to help engage someone and create a sense of calm. Finding guided imagery or descriptions of breathing techniques are useful to give ideas in the moment. Sensory rooms and equipment can support a feeling of calm.

Animals can help support people to relax and feel restored, though phobias, allergies and the nature of any animals will strongly influence how people respond to animals. Robo pets could offer an alternative. Bird feeders near windows can bring nature closer to indoors environments.

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4.1.2 Meaningful Life: Full spectrum of emotional experience

Grief and sadness

Emotions which are not happy can still be important for the sense of identity for someone living with dementia. The loss of loved ones, relationships or even a sense of your own abilities as dementia progresses

can create very strong feelings. It is very important not to dismiss these and undermine their importance as this can harm a relationship with the person with dementia. Distracting people from such feelings is often a short-lived solution or ineffective. By acknowledging the importance of these feelings and being present demonstrates that it is OK to feel these things but also helps the person to move through the present emotion.



Quick Ideas

It is very hard to rush grief and as such it is important to be honest. This may mean you have to explain you need to go but will be back, or ask the person to work alongside you if it is appropriate. Often sitting with someone can help. Listening or asking what the person was like can bring comfort. It is not possible to problem solve grief, and a person with dementia may relive it frequently but it still needs to be acknowledged as very real for them.

Bigger ideas

Group discussion of shared trauma can help the person to feel less isolated, such as discussing the feelings and challenges people experience when living with dementia. Certain events like wars, global financial crises and the pandemic are likely to have impacted on many peoples' lives and these shared experiences can have generational impacts.

Things to Consider:

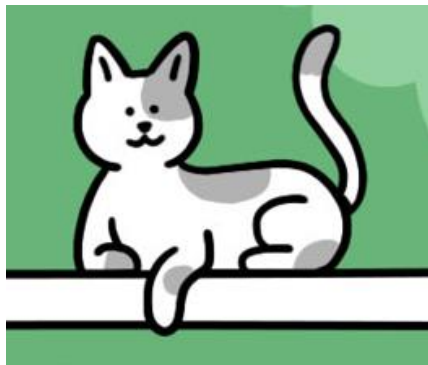
Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Photos or objects that trigger memories related to loss can be displayed but the person with dementia should guide where they should go. If they go in a communal area, it is important to consider how the person may feel if others touch or move them. Having a selection of ways to feel occupied may help someone to manage their emotions and choose to distract themselves, but it is important to be guided by the person.

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4.2.2 Occupation as a tool for therapeutic effect

Holding off disease progression

For some people living with dementia, it is important to do things they feel will delay or reduce the symptoms of dementia. This is often expressed as “use it or lose it”. This could be physical actions such as improving health outcomes like managing weight or blood pressure, or mental challenges such as retaining a skill, or recalling very important information.



Quick Ideas

Mental games such as crosswords, word searches or sudoku might be valued by some people, however caution needs to be used to ensure that others are supporting the person with dementia to undertake these in the way they want. For some the challenge of “getting it correct” might not be important. They may be completing it to create patterns or enjoy the action of filling it in.

Bigger ideas

Dancing, gym sessions, exercise classes or physical games such as bowls can help to improve or maintain physical health, strength, co-ordination and improve sleep patterns.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Labelled photos with important information such as family names can help to reinforce things the person with dementia values remembering the most.

Space for exercise such as walking might be helpful for some people, or opportunities to attend the local leisure center, pool, gym or yoga class.

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4.1.3 Meaningful life: Contributing on a personal level

Independence

Independence is often highly valued by both people living with dementia and those supporting them. As dementia progresses it can be hard for people to maintain the same level of independence. Supporting independence does not mean that the person with dementia needs to be independent in all aspects of their life. Somebody may gain a feeling of independence from occasional small actions rather than having to do everything by themselves. It also does not need to be constant, a person may choose to ask for support one day but not want it the next. Often occupations that help people to feel independent will also help someone to feel 'normal'.



Quick Ideas

Self-care activities such as washing and selecting clothes can help someone to feel a sense of independence.

Bigger ideas

Doing things such as the house keeping in their bedroom, their own ironing or shopping for personal items can support independence, even if this requires support such as going on a bus together to the shop.

Things to Consider:

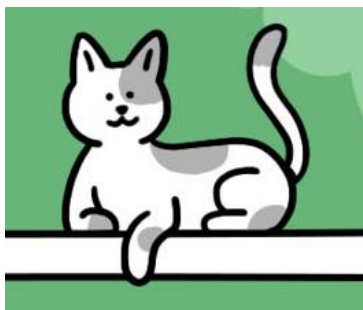
Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

For some people living with dementia, not being able to do the things they previously could is very distressing. This can occur through either seeing themselves 'fail' or through not having the opportunity to try. Protecting someone's feelings by preventing them from doing things is a natural response, particularly if it has caused distress in the past, however it can cause people to feel less human and capable.

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Inter-dependance

For some people relying on others is seen as something they want to avoid when asked, however we all live in a world where the actions of others impact on how we live. Our feelings towards independence and inter-dependence are not fixed. The language we use can change how people feel about it. Working as a team where everyone has a role can 'soften' the loss of independence for some people.



Quick Ideas

Saying thank you for helping or asking advice such as meal planning ideas. Emphasising how someone's attributes such as personality or laughter create a sense of community or joy, and that without the person the community would not feel the same.

Bigger ideas

Preparing a meal together for themselves and others. Looking after a pet, such as feeding, cleaning or walking. Having a role such as laying or clearing tables, gardening, watering plants or giving and making gifts for others can help create a sense of teamwork and togetherness.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

The emphasis on everyone being a part of the care home community can be achieved through things such as photographs and personal effects. The sense of belonging to a group reinforces how that community needs people. The feeling that a person's independence has reduced can create a sense of loss. The impact of these feelings can be softened if the person sees themselves as wanted and belonging to the group.

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4.1.1 Meaningful Life: Evolving identity

Learning new things

There is often a great deal of effort put into reminiscence and life history work, however for some these past activities can highlight skills which someone may have lost or now hold less meaning. The opportunities to try new things and see themselves as achieving now are sometimes limited for people living with dementia. Things which may not have been very important to someone in the past, for example keeping a photo journal or meditation, may now hold a great deal more importance.



Quick Ideas

Offer lots of opportunities to try new things such as arts, music, exercise or guided meditation. Remember that people may prefer to just watch or take a few tries before they decide if they would like to do something. People may also enjoy an activity on some occasions but not every time.

Bigger ideas

Inviting in community groups and projects such as 'knit and natter' or research may offer new opportunities for people. Likewise creating opportunities for performance or exhibition such as choirs or photography may offer new ways for people to see themselves and discover new skills. Organisations such as schools or universities may offer interesting partner projects. Activities that can be broken into different steps such as weaving or mosaics can create impact in an accessible way.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

The space somebody does an activity in can affect how they feel about it. For some they may only enjoy singing alone. Others may only like pies when they eat them at a football match. People may find their previous hobbies are not the same when not undertaken in the same place. Little clues in speech and body language may help to identify why someone no longer seems interested in something they once loved.

Our interests and tastes change throughout our lives but we need new experience so we can find what matters to us in each stage of life.

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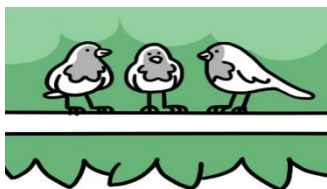
Legitimacy of power

Person centered care guidance for best practice talks about how important it is for care of people with dementia to reflect their preferences and support their choices. However, people living with dementia have reported feeling like their opinions maybe asked but they don't have any real power to influence or change anything. Feeling like their opinions are not valued reduces the likelihood that the person will want to share their feelings in the future. This can remain even if the person does not recall the details of why the felt undervalued.



Quick Ideas

Asking where somebody would like something such as where they would prefer to eat their meal, if they prefer the clean clothes put away or would sooner do it themselves. If somebody moves an object or opens a window respect their choice.



Bigger ideas

Involve people in planning the structure of their day or events, such as when they would prefer to get up or eat.

Choosing plants for the garden or involvement in selecting interior choices such as ornaments, curtains or paint colours.

Lifestyle decisions such as smoking and the opportunity to do this need to be respected and catered for.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Communal living can cause problems when residents have different opinions. Having smaller areas in communal parts of a building can make it easier for people to make changes without it affecting other people in close proximity.

People living with dementia also have the right to make 'unwise' decisions. It is the law within the UK that an adult is assumed to have capacity to make decisions unless proven otherwise. Even if a decision seems unwise, such as refusing surgery, or walking in the rain, it is still within the person's rights to choose. It is important that these decisions are informed however and that every care is taken to ensure the person understands the consequences of their decisions.

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4.1.1 Living a meaningful life: Link to past identity, and opportunities for an evolving and changing identity

Levels of doing

For some people with dementia, it can be challenging or stressful trying to do activities in the way they previously did. This may not mean that they do not still want to be involved.

Changing how someone is involved in an activity might make it easier for them to join in. This could mean them adapting the activity itself, so it is carried out in a different way, or even just watching an activity.



Quick Ideas

Adapt card games or puzzles- these can either be watched or instead of following the rules, create new ways to play. Put cards down in turn to create the feel of the game without the rules. Discuss the jigsaw pieces such as “this looks like a window”, stack them or put them anywhere. The interaction remains but the demand on the person living with dementia is less.

Bigger ideas

All things can be adapted to involve people to different degrees. Creating art might involve sorting mosaic pieces into colour whilst others arrange them, taking on a small part of cooking a meal such as chopping or mixing. Being involved with a choir might not include the singing but the person still wants to sit with everyone and have a song sheet.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Involving people to different levels can be done through encouraging accessibility to activities, leaving objects on tables rather than tidying everything away. Discussing daily tasks such as cleaning or commenting on paperwork as you are doing it can help to create a feeling of involvement for the person living with dementia. When completing paperwork have other pens and sheets available in case the person also wants to join in.

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4.1.1 Meaningful Life: Sense of normality

Links to the past and creating recognisable patterns in life

For many people with dementia doing “every-day” things that they have done in the past can help them to feel they are the same person and not see themselves as diminished by their dementia.

Sometimes it isn’t the specific activity that is meaningful, but rather the pattern of the activity. Walking to collect the paper might be an important activity for someone even though they may not read the paper. A walk without a purpose or end goal might not have the same

appeal. Sometimes the activities help to create recognisable patterns in the day which help people to feel more like themselves. Things which may be seen as mundane have been described by people living with dementia as helping them to “still feel normal”.



Quick Ideas

Watching the news or having a drink at a certain time of day, doing the washing up after a meal, going to the pub for a drink and chat with a friend, feeding the birds, attending sports matches of the team which the person has followed.

Bigger ideas

Having set tasks for people that reflect busy periods of the day such as taking a dog for a walk or going to shop at a time someone might usually be finishing work or picking a child up from school, can help if someone who feels compelled to be busy at certain times of day.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

An environment which has the flexibility for people to introduce their own personal routines supports people to keep doing the things which help them to feel like themselves.

The past interests of a person and their biography are important as they contribute to who the person is, however, people's experience of the past may be traumatic, or they may no longer have the same interests. Whilst the past can be very meaningful it is important to remember to support new or changing interests and feelings.

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4.2.1 Occupation as a tool to manage emotions and behaviour

Managing behaviour that create challenges

People living with dementia may act with behaviours that challenge, both towards themselves and others for many reasons. It may stem from frustration, biological changes or their social learning. These feelings are often very understandable, however from a position of ensuring safety and protecting others, it becomes important for staff working in care homes to help defuse aggression where possible.



Quick Ideas

Remain calm and avoid seeming cross or frustrated. This naturally helps the person to mirror your calm tone.

Listening to the person's concerns without arguing. This helps the person to see that you take their feelings seriously. Arguing will also only serve to heighten the person's emotional state, often with negative consequences for them.

Ask questions like please tell me what's happened/ how do you feel. Do not disagree with the person if they are telling you how they feel, even if it you see it differently. By opening up and sharing how they feel the person is building trust. Suggest moving somewhere else where you can give the person your full attention.

Bigger ideas

Many things can contribute to a person behaving in a way that is challenging; like managing physical things such as pain, tiredness or hunger. Ensuring these needs are met may help. Emotional issues such as boredom, loneliness or believing their feelings are not seen as important can contribute to someone acting in a way that is challenging. Ensuring people have the chance to feel valued and involved can help reduce these feelings.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

To help with talking to a person in a heightened state of emotion you can use the TED principles: Tell me about your feelings, explain what is making you feel like this, describe what is going on for you? This can help people to feel more in control of their emotions.

Having a safe space to calm down can help someone to work through their emotions by both moving away from potential triggers and the new environment may interrupt patterns of thought that perpetuate feelings of anger. Venting anger and frustration has the potential to reinforce these feelings so it is important to try to support the person until the person's feelings are more regulated.

Note:

It is essential that people remain safe in their workplace and all reasonable means to reduce risk of harm to staff are taken

Consent and data protection:

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See workbook for full details.

4.2.1 Occupation as a tool to manage emotions and behaviour

Managing Frustration

For many people living with dementia can be very frustrating. This is a natural human response. The awareness of lost skills and increased dependence can be emotionally challenging. When moving into a residential care setting these feelings can potentially be combined with reduced choice and having to spend more time with other people that that they may not have otherwise chosen. This can add to the feelings of frustration. These intense feelings may need an outlet which distraction is unable to fulfil.



Whilst venting frustrating can be helpful for some in the short term, it is important to help work through it and try to address the frustration. Repeating negative thoughts can reinforce anger and increase the feelings.

Quick Ideas

Breathing techniques can help, though sometimes venting frustration is useful. Shouting with someone can generate feelings of release, but it has to be led by the person. Having something to physically vent frustration such as a collection of books to rip or cushion to throw may help.

Bigger ideas

Ensuring choice and regular exercise can help to reduce frustration, though everyone experiences it sometimes. Acknowledging it is normal and providing a safe place to vent frustration can help people to work through acute feelings. Acknowledge the frustration is very real and listen to the person's feelings but try to avoid leaving people in the heightened state.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Space for people to be away from others, and space to vent frustration and to feel no judgement can help to give someone the time to regulate their emotions. Frustration is a normal response to challenges in life.

Whilst outbursts can help someone to manage their immediate feelings it is not a long-term solution. Identifying the cause and finding ways to minimize the impact is the most effective way to manage frustration.

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4.2.1 Occupation as a tool to manage emotions and behaviour

Creating moments of joy

Both people living with dementia and those in their support network use occupation to help to manage emotions. It can help to relieve negative feelings and support a good quality of life. Creating moments of fun or joy comes naturally to most people and is often a spontaneous moment, though it has a huge impact on the lives of people living with dementia.



Quick Ideas

The little moments of connection, a joke, a wink, a song, can bring a smile and momentarily lift mood. These short moments can build a sense of connection and belonging.

Bigger ideas

Moments of joy can be very personal such as a family visits or recreating memories, though more general activities such as games, parties, shows or dancing can bring joy and laughter. Spending time outdoors and in the sunshine can boost hormones that create feelings of happiness.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Fun can be found in most things, however it is often in the connection between people. How rooms are laid out can help people connect, such as chairs in small groups. Seating in busy communal spaces like wide corridors allow for people to have multiple small interactions if they choose.

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4.3.3 Supportive Environment: Awareness of the persons intentions and choices

Recognising motivation, choice and environmental prompts

It can be challenging to recognise the small indications of what a person with dementia would like to do. This can be very difficult if the person says something different from their actions or body language. People often have conflicting emotions whereby someone would like to do something but simultaneously feels concerned by it. Encouragement can often help a person with dementia to try activities, but it is important to always give the person the opportunity to change their mind or stop.



Quick Ideas

Having objects close to hand helps a person to decide to do something without having to plan or think about options.

Copying the actions of a person with dementia such as counting objects or touching fabrics with them allows them to choose what they want to do.

Verbal connection such as this can help to build a feeling of connection.

Bigger ideas

It can often take multiple exposures to a type of occupation before someone feels ready to try it.

Having a regular activity, such as an exercise class, may help to slowly build interest.

It is important to remember that involvement can look different from the original planned activity.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Having easy and visible access to a variety of different things helps people with dementia to choose what to do and when. Things such as rummage boxes, cleaning equipment such as dusters, puzzles left out on tables can remove some of the need to think about what to do, and help people to feel motivated to try something.

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4.3.4 Supportive Environment: Expectation a person can contribute

Reduced Motivation

There can be many reasons somebody appears not to be motivated to do things. It maybe they are worried that they can't manage anymore, or they may feel too overwhelmed. Starting something can seem daunting or make people feel anxious. Adapting activities can help someone see they can still achieve things and potentially reduce the fear of failing. However, interests also change. Some activities may just have less meaning for people, and new activities may be more motivating.



Quick Ideas

To overcome the initial worry, you could start the activity next to the person so they can watch and slowly become involved when they feel more confident. Meaning can come from an activity in many ways such as just watching. Accepting different levels of involvement may make it easier for the person with dementia to feel more motivated.

Bigger ideas

Larger activities or projects are difficult to be flexible with timing. Keeping the doors open so people can come and go as they need, or having access to refreshments and quiet areas for people that need a break can help people to become involved at a level that they feel comfortable with.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Planning activities with lots of different ways for people to be involved can help make it easier for people to start slowly. Try to factor in considerations such as extra clothes in case people get hot or cold, and refreshments. This should reduce physical discomfort that may prevent people from wanting to continue with an activity.

Having opportunities for occupations at different times of day and evening is a way that you can meet people's needs more flexibly when people are feeling most motivated.

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4.2.1 Occupation as a tool to manage emotions and behaviour

Relieving Boredom

Living with dementia can make starting an activity seen daunting, or many activities seem very challenging. This, along with living in a different place such as a care home, can discourage people from finding ways to be enjoyably occupied. A lack of occupation can cause people to feel bored and lead to other negative feelings such as frustration and lower motivation. Supporting people to be engaged in ways that hold meaning for them can help to relieve boredom and any negative emotions which stem from it.



Quick Ideas

Interacting with animals such as stroking a cat to watching birds, or active things such as walks release hormones which can raise mood.

Walks or going outside offer a change of environment which can help to reduce boredom.

Bigger ideas

Having a moment of peaceful reflection may not mean someone is bored however, regular engagement that offer opportunities such as regular exercise classes or guided meditation can offer immediate relief of boredom but also something to look forward too.

Having photographs of previous activities around the room it happened in might help to inspire engagement.



Things to Consider:

Environmental Ideas, resources and considerations:

Moving into a residential care setting can leave people feeling uncertain about what they can do or are “allowed” to do. Feeling a sense of ownership of the home can make starting an activity easier. Having someone’s belongings around them can help people living in a care home to have a feeling of ownership. Having a role such as opening curtains or putting deliveries away can help people to feel less like a guest and reliant on other people to suggest what to do.

Pets can offer excellent boredom relief; however, this may not be a practical option for all care providers. Alternatives such as therapy pets or robopets can offer another way of interacting.

Boredom can often stem from someone feeling like they have a lack of purpose. Having areas with a clear purpose can help someone living with dementia to choose what they could do. An example might be an area of house plants with a list of potential activities such as water the plants, pick off the brown leaves, check the soil is not dry or even talk to the plants. Make sure all plants are non-toxic and have good drainage. Leave a spray water bottle next to the plants.

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4.1. 3Meaningful life: Contributing on a personal level

Sense of ownership

Feeling like a guest in the environment can limit how likely a person is to initiate activities and feel safe to fully relax. People can feel that they need to be given permission before starting something or making any changes. This can lead people to rely on others more and wait to be invited to undertake activities.

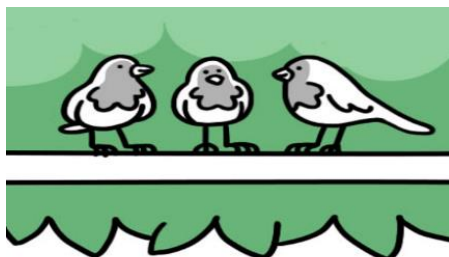


Quick Ideas

Making decisions such as if domestic staff can enter their room every day or how much of the housework each person does can help some people feel their room belongs to them. The person with dementia may choose to do some themselves such as they may prefer if they dust but someone else vacuums.

Bigger ideas

For some people having a key to their personal space such as a bedroom means they feel they have a secure sanctuary and control over who enters.



Things to Consider:

Environmental Ideas, resources and considerations:

Having personal photos and ornaments can create a feeling of belonging and ownership. Awareness of potential conflict arising from living in a communal setting is recommended but shouldn't prevent placing people's belongings in communal areas. Consideration of where an item goes and how fragile it is may reduce issues.

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4.1.1 Meaningful Life: a sense of normality

Sharing activities

For some people living with dementia, it can be stressful and upsetting to try and do complex things on their own if they see themselves as no longer able to. However, by breaking things down into lots of small steps it can make these activities more accessible and enjoyable.

By guiding someone through the steps of an activity you are sharing the conscious effort and helping them to undertake complex things which might be too challenging on their own.



Quick Ideas

Laying clothes out in the order they are to be put on, or item at a time, will remove the need for a person living with dementia to have to find the right sequence of steps to get dressed. This makes it less demanding for the person to still be able to feel they can achieve it and feel less dependent.

Bigger ideas

Cooking a meal for the other residents involves lots of different component activities such as chopping and stirring. By directing when to do these and demonstrating how to do them it is possible for someone to use another person's help to achieve a very complex thing like creating a meal.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Having see-through cupboard doors allow people to see what is inside so they can find the things they need to start an activity or carry on with their activity. This means that the room itself reduces some of the cognitive processes needed for the person to do their activity. Short signs and labels saying things like “turn on” for a radio help the person with dementia to undertake an activity that might otherwise be too complicated or challenging.

Preparing a breakdown of an activity before you start will help you to see what the different steps of an activity are and plan who might take on each bit. It might help to have reminder cards for each step such as “chop carrots”. When the step is complete, the card is removed and replaced by a new one such as “put carrots in the pan”. Pick recipes that have multiple tasks and that do not rely on precise timing.

Ensure all equipment is ready and after the task is over remove the equipment so it can't be mistaken for something needed for the present task. The space the person living with dementia is working in will then prompt them to remember what they are doing in that moment.

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4.1.1 Living a meaningful life: a sense of normality

Supporting friendship

Friendships can seem very different between people living with dementia when compared to a more conventional relationship. This can be due to memory issues, communication problems or frustration. However, affection for others and a feeling of belonging to a group of people seen as peers and friends can be very important for people living with dementia. Though friendships may appear less traditional they can still offer a great deal of comfort and meaning.



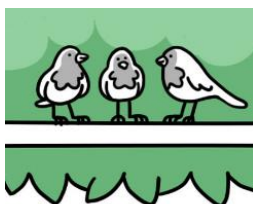
Quick Ideas

Group activities such as singing, dancing or physical games give people the chance to see others and connect with them without a need for conversation.

These connections build positive feelings that are associated with another person even if the details of why are forgotten.

Bigger ideas

Hosting community groups such as a gardening club, knitting groups or a choir gives people living in residential care an opportunity to build new friendships or for old friends to find common interests that are less demanding than a one-to-one conversation.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Having seating in small groups allows easier conversation and sofas give the chance for people to physically connect. Things like holding hands offer friendship and a bond when verbal skills or hearing problems might limit the chance for friendship.

Displaying photos of periods where people were having fun together can help people to associate the faces of the people around them with feeling happy.

Physical games can include things such as keeping balloons in the air, games like Jenga or carpet bowls. Remember that these games can be adapted according to physical needs such as using a length of gutter during bowls games to help people bowl from their seat. Similarly rules of traditional games can be adapted, for example Jenga might become building a tower by taking it in turns to place the blocks.

Hosting clubs will require a risk assessment and if money is taken for resources such as paint or wool, this needs to be correctly documented and audited according to up to date guidance and care home policies.

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4.3.3 Supportive Environment: Other's seeing legitimacy in occupations

Understanding the person's world

Why someone chooses to do something and the way they choose to do it can be influenced by lots of different things. This could be time of day, how they are feeling in the moment or how they have always done it. These choices are not set and can change even as somebody is doing an activity. Recognising the way someone chooses to do something is important to show you respect their decisions and helps you to enter their world even if the reason behind why it is important is not clear.



Quick Ideas

Join in with what the person is doing without trying to adapt it to make it easier for us to understand.

This may be tracing a pattern on the carpet or ripping paper.

For the person it holds value and by joining in it demonstrates you recognise that they find valuable.

Bigger ideas

Watching how a person responds and interacts with the world around them can tell you a lot about how they feel. Spending time observing someone either using tools such as dementia care mapping or just sitting and watching and listening to how interactions affect how someone feels can lead to greater knowledge of the person's world.

Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

Having mementos of the person's life around the environment such as pictures, ornaments, personal objects or things for the person's favourite pastimes can support shared engagement. It can also involve a selection of textured objects or things to smell or taste which can be explored together. Having things laid out in easy to reach areas increases the chance for people to interact with the environment in their own way without prior planning.

Formal observation tools have been created to understand the lived experience of people with dementia, these are standardized and tested. Such tools require training and financial outlay, however they can be repeated to see potential change in a person's experience over time. Informal observations could involve just sitting a little way off and watching and listening to how someone reacts during the day. It may help to have a pen and paper to jot down notes to reflect on later. Observation is useful to help gain insight into someone's world though it is important to ensure that it does not make the person uncomfortable and that the information is used to improve their experience.

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4.1.3 Meaningful life: Contributing to the social environment.

Undertaking useful tasks

For some people how they see their usefulness and value is linked to how important they believe the things that they can do are. Seeing themselves as having no role or contribution can lead people to feel that they don't have worth. Having the opportunity to do something useful reinforces that the person is still important in their community. It is important that both the person living with dementia and those around them recognise the value in the person's contribution. Activities that are seen to be superficial or insincere undermine worth.



Quick Ideas

Involvement with cleaning and gardening. Helping to plan meal or activity schedules, such as ideas for visitors or visits to other places. Even helping to putting away deliveries can create a feeling of being useful.

Bigger ideas

Caring for a pet offers a constant role. Other potential roles could include participation in a care home committee for decisions, this could include being involved in the interview process for new staff.



Things to Consider:

Environmental ideas, resources and considerations:

A key consideration in this is that the person with dementia should see their contribution as useful. The person may prefer to have directions to help them complete an activity or they may prefer to do it themselves. It is important that if minor errors are made or it achieves a different outcome, these are not immediately rectified or the job removed. An example might be cutting the heads of the flowers in the garden, these could be added to a vase or create a flower pressing activity later and the person still sees the value of their contribution.

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