

Making Quality Connections with People with Dementia

- What is dementia? What is Alzheimer's disease?
- Symptoms Common to Most Dementias . . . Over Time
 - Affect a person's entire life. Causes the brain to shrink and stop working.
 - Steal memories – the most recent first, but eventually almost all.
 - Steal our ability to use language . . . may leave you with some 'skills.'
 - Steal our ability to understand what others mean and say.
 - Steal our ability to use reasoning and logic.
 - Make even the 'familiar' seem odd and scary.
 - Steal our ability to care for ourselves and move around safely.
 - Rob us of impulse control – taking away emotional and mood control.
- A Positive Physical Approach for Someone with Dementia
 - Come from the front, go slow, get to the side, get low, offer your hand (palm up), use the person's preferred name, wait for a response
 - Important to connect physically first . . . before we try to get the person with dementia to do something. This may be eye contact, smile, hand shake, holding hands, gentle touch, hug . . .
- Basic Needs: Physical and Social
 - Physical: Food, water, shelter, safety, being clean
 - Social: Being accepted by others, feeling connected to others, having a job to do.
- Getting to Know You
 - What is something you're good at? What is something that makes you smile?
 - What is the person with dementia's life story? What did the person do? What did the person like? What did the person dislike?
 - What is the person still capable of doing? What is the person's gifts? What does the person still treasure, value?
 - What makes the person laugh? What makes the person upset?
 - Changes . . . day to day and moment to moment

- Communication Strategies
 - Simple things can be the best way to soothe, comfort, and bring joy to person with dementia.
 - Use name . . . often (person with dementia's preferred name, our name).
 - Keep requests short and simple.
 - Give short step-by-step instructions for tasks.
 - Ask "yes" or "no" questions. Allow time for response.
 - Speak slowly and clearly
 - Be warm, easy going, and calm. Don't rush.
 - Maintain eye contact. Be patient and supportive. Listen and show interest.
 - Pay attention to non-verbals (tone of voice, facial expressions, body language).
 - Use clues for success (demo, point, touch, notes).
 - Use compliments often . . . praise them and touch their heart.
 - Avoid arguing, criticizing or correcting.
 - Look for the meaning and feelings behind the word.
 - Join their reality when they cannot understand ours . . . the more compassionate approach.

- Getting Connected
 - Building on the physical connection
 - Know the person with dementia
 - Use the person's life story . . . conversations, activities
 - Share the person's life story . . . with all who help to provide care
 - How to connect: Eye contact, smile, gentle touch, holding hands, response from person with dementia
 - Remind person with dementia of their gifts/talents

- Connecting Through Activities (Adult Focus)
 - Art is in the doing, not in what's done
 - Tap into past interests or skills
 - Recall work-related past
 - Stimulate the five senses
 - Use remaining physical skills
 - Meet religious/spiritual needs
 - Personal care is an activity; adding a social connection.
 - Doing "with" not "for"
 - Sharing: Making a "new" quality connection

- Sources
 - Alzheimer's Association, Foundations of Dementia Care Training Program, Making Connections.
 - Best Friends Approach to Alzheimer's Care, David Troxel and Virginia Bell.
 - Creating Moments of Joy, Jolene Brackey.
 - Talking to Alzheimer's: Simple Ways to Connect When You Visit with a Family Member or Friend, Claudia J. Strauss.