

# Activities for Living Well



## *Creating Themed Boxes, Memory Boxes, and Themed Trunks for Dementia Residents*

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**F**ew programs provide opportunities for staff interaction and team building while at the same time engaging family members and providing real benefit to dementia residents. When properly executed, this program offers benefits to all who participate.

Creating themed boxes, memory boxes, or themed trunks can be an important component of a dementia activity program in a residential setting, assisted living facility, nursing home, adult day care, or home care setting. A reminiscing and sensory stimulation program can be conducted in a group setting, or provided to residents individually or as part of a program involving family members. Sensory enrichment programs have many forms such as:

- Memory Boxes and Theme Boxes
- Themed/Seasonal Murals
- Laughter Kits
- Sensory Gardens, Sensory Rooms, Sensory Carts
- Picture Books

### **Benefits to Residents**

Residents benefit in many ways when the program is implemented correctly, and it is important that staff are trained in reminiscing and sensory stimulation and that they understand the benefits of the program. If you don't currently have a policy and procedure for reminiscing and sensory stimulation, consider developing and implementing one.

Residents benefit from reminiscing and sensory stimulation in many ways including:

- Social stimulation, opportunity to build new relationships, awareness of group members
- Improved quality of life, sense of accomplishment, and self-esteem
- Replenished spirit and sense of accomplishment
- Brain exercise and cognitive stimulation, increased alertness
- Pleasurable experience or emotional outlet
- Relief of boredom, alleviation of depression
- Enhancement of performance
- Reminiscing
- Reduced stress and anxiety, relaxation
- Proactive self-expression, creative outlet
- Environmental awareness
- Increased sense of belonging
- Increased communication
- Enjoyment and pleasure of leisure experience
- Stimulation of the senses



- Involvement in meaningful, failure-free, purposeful activity

### **Benefits to Staff**

Staff benefit too by providing compassionate care, understanding residents' uniqueness and life histories, and forming new relationships with peers and with residents on a deeper level.

### **Getting Started with Staff**

Involve the staff in creating themed boxes. Explain the program and provide staff with some suggestions or themes. Ask each staff member to create a seasonal theme box with items related to a specific month or event. Give them a week to think about ideas and report their ideas at the next meeting.

Encourage each staff member to create a themed box with 6 to 10 tactile items and at least one item for the other senses (kinesthetic [movement], visual [sight], auditory [sound], olfactory [smell], and gustatory [taste]). Provide each participant with a shoebox or Tupperware box with a lid. Write the theme name on each container. Provide a small budget of a few dollars per container to purchase the items. The items can be purchased at thrift shops, garage sales, dollar stores, and job lot stores. Place a sign in the staff lounge and encourage everyone to list specific items they need. This encourages all staff to work cooperatively to help one another fill the box-

es. This type of program involves all of your staff and uses one of the most unique traits available to activity professionals and recreation therapists: creativity.

You can also solicit contributions from the families of residents. Post signs or place a "Want Ad" in the facility newsletter that explains the program and lists the types of items you are seeking. Many families really want to get involved and might even volunteer to present a themed box of their own.

One facility assigned themes to each department relating to that department's function. For example, dietary was asked to come up with two ideas. One was items used for cooking. Another was items used for washing dishes. This can be an excellent way to get the whole building involved. It's important to give detailed written instructions so that everyone clearly understands the program and how to compile themed boxes. Provide an example, such as a theme box called Baseball that would include a baseball, baseball diamond, uniform, cleats, etc.

### Creating a Memory Box

When creating the memory box keep in mind:

- Older people should be familiar with most or all of the items in the kits.
- Select the objects carefully so that they relate to specific ideas, events, occasions, or period of life.
- Ensure that the objects are appropriate for residents' age and are safe for older people to use.

To provide an interesting visual for your program, consider the purchase of an old trunk or suitcase. At the beginning of each session, transfer the items from the shoe box or Tupperware container into the old trunk or suitcase. This will peak curiosity and maybe even stimulate some memories. Old trunks and suitcases can be found at thrift shops, garage sales, and antique shops. Be sure that the trunk is clean, safe, and won't close on anyone's hands. Have the maintenance department check the hinges. Provide interesting theme names on the activity calendar for your theme boxes, such as a Day at The Beach, Blue Sunday (Blue Colors), or Famous Sweethearts.

This program is intended for residents in later stages of dementia; however, the program can be adapted and used with all residents. Name the program "Guess What's In the Trunk," and give clues until residents have guessed each item hidden in the trunk.

Be sure that each box has items related to the theme that stimulate several senses. For example, a picnic theme box might include iced tea for taste, or a baseball theme might include a CD of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game."

Prepare about 20 questions related to the kit's theme and keep the questions in the kit for future use. Try to use what, where, when, and why questions. For exam-

## Ideas for Kits

Life Roles Kits: Mother, Father, Daughter, Grandparent, Best Friend  
 Occupations: Priest, Nun, Teacher, Doctor, Nurse, Factory Worker  
 Thanksgiving, Christmas, St. Patrick's Day, New Years Eve, Halloween  
 A Day at the Beach, Railroad, Gambling  
 Baking, Grocery Shopping, Spring Cleaning, Gardening  
 Fishing, Military, Farming, Cars and Trucks  
 Babies, Toys, Weddings  
 The Great Depression  
 Factory Jobs, Office  
 Autumn, Spring, Summer, Winter  
 Graduation, Proms, Back to School, School Days  
 Vacation, Travel and Packing  
 Tool Sheds, Tackle Box, Garages  
 Sports (Baseball, Football, Soccer, Cheerleading)  
 Colors (Green, Red, Purple, Black, White)  
 Airline Tickets and Travel  
 Animals (Dogs, Cats, Horses, etc.)  
 Tea Time, Coffee Klatch  
 Smells of Winter (or Spring, Fall, Summer)  
 Bundling Up For the Cold Weather

ple, when a resident offers a response, ask, "Can you tell me more?"

Introduce the residents to the activity professional and the other participants. It is important to use every opportunity to use the residents' names and the names of others in the program. Once the kits are created and the questions have been developed, begin the program with residents seated around a large table. Explain the theme you will be discussing. Bring the items out one by one and encourage discussion about what each item is or represents. Have each resident touch the items. Ask for input from each resident, one at a time. Place each item on the table. Responses will be different from each resident, and their responses are neither right nor wrong. The goal is to prompt a response, an emotion, or a memory.

Knowing the residents' strengths and past history may also be a way of opening the discussion. Some group members may be shy. For example, if you are developing a "Teacher's Kit," you might say, "Mr. Smith, I heard you were a great history teacher. What do you think of this textbook?"

Give everyone ample opportunity to respond. A de-

mentia resident needs time to process what has just been asked and may need to search for words. Be aware of gestures, facial expressions, and body movements that may be nonverbal cues about what they are trying to express. Ask one question at a time and wait for a response, even if the silence seems uncomfortable. If you do not get a response, thank the resident for trying. Some residents may offer only a simple one-word answer while others may offer several sentences. However detailed or fleeting, all of their thoughts and input are to be valued.

On a flip chart or white board, write down the responses and at the end of the session incorporate the responses into a story. Encourage participation in creating the story. You could then publish the story in the facility newsletter. Sometimes the reminiscing or tool kit may elicit an emotional response, such as sadness or tearfulness. This is not a bad response as long as the resident is not a danger to himself or others. It's ok to ask the person why he or she is sad. All feelings that are experienced during a reminiscing session are valid and important.

Next, provide something to eat, drink, or smell that is related to the theme, and close the session with a song related to the theme because music can uplift the spirit.

### Insulin Pens Provide 21st Century Care for AL Residents

*(continued from page 19)*

insulin vial. This advantage has the potential to dramatically decrease the amount of insulin waste often seen with expired vials. Furthermore, the New Jersey Department of Health recommends that opened pens be stored in the med cart at room temperature, as opposed to the refrigerator, providing even greater convenience for administration. Each insulin administration requires only the use of a new OSHA-compliant needle, which is deposited in the sharps container after use, providing less waste than an insulin syringe and allowing for a greener environment.

Prior to the administration of each dose, all pens must be primed with 2 units of insulin to ensure the accuracy and elimination of air bubbles. It is important to remember that the elimination of air bubbles is also necessary when administering insulin

via a vial and a syringe. Any insulin residue left on the resident's skin following injection is due to the priming and not part of the insulin dose. Following the administration of each dose, the pen must be held in place

### The new generation of insulin pens is aiding both patients and caregivers.

for an amount of time determined by the manufacturer (anywhere from 5 to 10 seconds) to ensure complete absorption of the insulin. This mimics the proper technique for administering insulin via a syringe in which the plunger is to be slowly depressed by the administrator and then quickly withdrawn. All other

### Endless Possibilities for Themed Boxes

Boxes can be developed based on holidays, colors, themes, resident's interests, cultures, hobbies, items from the past, work, pets, children, religions, countries, horticulture, etc. Ask the residents what kind of memory box they would like to have. See "Ideas for Kits."

Family members can participate in these sessions, and their participation may even help to initiate feedback from a resident. Make a list of all the theme boxes you create and allow families to "sign out" a specific theme box to use with their family member. This is a fantastic way to demonstrate your level of compassion and commitment to your residents and to help families engage and interact with one another.

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*Activities for Living Well* was created to shed light on the extraordinary opportunities we all have to live well as we age. Our goal is to increase awareness of some of these programs and activities and we invite you to share your stories with our readers. Tell us about your Activities for Living Well. e-mail [JMaybin@healthcommedia.com](mailto:JMaybin@healthcommedia.com).

techniques for administration with insulin pens remain consistent with those of a vial and syringe, including the necessary handwashing, rotation of injection sites, and skin swabbing prior to injection.

In conclusion, the advantages for using insulin pens greatly outweigh those of using a vial and syringe. Insulin pens add the benefit of greater accuracy, ease of administration, and the ability to change dosage by just changing the medication administration record and attaching a label to the package indicating the dosage change. Furthermore, they are cost effective, environmentally friendly, and 100% accurate. These advantages make insulin pens a smart choice for LTC and home settings.

ALC

Next month, read how insulin pens are used in New Jersey LTC facilities.

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