Meaningful Activities for People with Dementia

Alzheimer’s Association 2012 Spring Symposium

Natalie B. Davis ACC

Session Objectives:

• Define meaningful activity
• Analyze the outcomes of a successful activity
• Develop strength based activities
• Understand the importance of life story information
• Discuss adaptations and simplification of meaningful activities

Introductory Exercises:

"Becoming Who they Were"

I Have—Have YOU?

Find Someone Who………

1. Likes to sing gospel music___________________________________
2. Likes to reminisce through pictures/scrapbooks_________________
3. Likes to smell/taste Starbuck’s coffee_________________________
4. Likes to exercise on a regular basis____________________________
5. Likes to express themselves through music, art, writing___________
6. Likes to watch football_____________________________________
7. Likes to read the newspaper daily______________________________
8. Likes to go to parties and social gatherings_____________________  
9. Likes to work in the garden__________________________________
10. Likes to read the Bible or read before bed_____________________ 
11. Likes to do crossword or jigsaw puzzles_______________________
12. Likes to play a musical instrument____________________________
13. Likes to sit outside daily____________________________________
14. Likes to make “things” with their hands_______________________
15. Likes to relax watching a movie______________________________

Components of a Meaningful Activity

o Makes a connection to a person or thing in the environment-Engagement
o Reinforces the unique identity of the person-values
o Uses preserved skills and promotes functional competence. It challenges but does not frustrate.
o Uses gentle arousal of the senses for maximum enrichment
o Validates the important habits and routines of the participant
o Communicates worth and belongingness through touch, laughter and love.
Activity engagement involves a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Outcomes of a Meaningful Activity

- Opportunities for fine/gross motor movements
- Opportunities to improve muscle tone and flexibility
- Opportunities for the release of tension
- Opportunities to meet others and share conversation
- Opportunities to share thoughts and opinions
- Opportunities to share past accomplishments
- Opportunities to make decisions/choices
- Opportunities to be part of a group
- Opportunities to think and problem solve
- Opportunities to remember and reminisce
- Opportunities to learn something new
- Opportunities to focus attention on a task
- Opportunities to follow directions
- Opportunities to be successful/feelings of mastery and accomplishment
- Opportunities for visual and tactile discrimination
- Opportunities that encourage a sense of identity and “self”
- Opportunities for accomplishment and immediate success
- Opportunities to relax, laugh and have fun
- Opportunities to convey emotions/express affection
- Opportunities for touch and physical contact
- Opportunities to reminisce about pleasant thoughts and positive memories
- Opportunities to express creativity
- Opportunities for spiritual feelings and fulfillment
- Opportunities to help or be of service to others
- Opportunities to escape from their normal routine
Case Examples:

Developing Strength Based Activities

1. Life Story Information (see sample page 4-5)

   Life skills are identified
   Interests and involvement patterns are understood
   Now becomes meaningful by a link to the past
   Key to successful interventions is a connection to lifelong habits and values

2. The “I CAN” list (see sample page 6-7)

3. Create the Opportunities (refer to page 8-9)

4. Apply the knowledge through engagement skills
A life story is a description of the unique characteristics of a person. It includes

- The lifelong patterns of social involvement and engagement
- The unique “moments” and experiences that have made an emotional impact
- A statement of VALUES that defines the person’s actions
- A set of interests and preferences that form our IDENTITY
- A portrait of our habits and routines
- A collection of special accomplishments that reinforce our worth
- A description of relationships that provide rootedness and connectivity to others

(written by Natalie B. Davis while compiling the life story of her father)
LEARNING ACTIVITY: Dementia Specific Assessment Information and Family Guide

Use the following fill in the blank assessment tool to tell us about your relative. Let us know “Things I like….” Such as

Past games and hobbies
Things that are beautiful
Familiar projects done with the hands (motor movements, musical instruments)
Music favorites and habits
Lifelong habits (sports, transportation, clothing styles, forms of exercise, dance)
Daily routines (coffee, reading, food, home maintenance)
Creativity
Life stories “favorites”
Sensory favorites (smells, colors, tastes, textures, sounds)

All About ________________________________ (name)

My friends call me _______________________. I lived in ____________ for _____ years. Prior to that, I lived in ____________ and ________________.

I call ___________________________ home.

My favorite thing about home is _________________.

I have/had ___________________________________________________________ (sisters and brothers, husband)

I have ________________________________ children and grandchildren.

I am a ____________________________________________ (farmer, artist, fisherman, golfer).

When I was younger I used to love to ___________________________________

Some of my favorite “special things” are ________________________________

The family that visits me the most are ________________________________.

And friends that come to visit are ________________________________.

I am very good at ______________________________________ and I am very proud of ____________________________________________ (kids/grandkids, legacies)

My favorite place to travel is _________________________________. I like to read _________________________________ , and listen to _________________________________.

One of my favorite outdoor pastimes is ________________________________.

Things I like to eat and drink include ______________________________________ (black coffee, sweets, beverage, meal, snack)

I like to get up at ___________________ and ___________________. My favorite outfits and accessories include ________________________________

3 Things I would like others to know about me are

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The “I CAN LIST” is a technique developed by Natalie B. Davis ACC in 1995 to identify the retained abilities of her father. By identifying the preserved abilities, activities are then created and encouraged which utilize and reinforce those strengths. The list is divided into the following categories: Physical, Cognitive, Communication, Socialization, and Retained habits and skills. Families and staff are encouraged to create their own “I CAN” lists.

**The “I CAN” List**
Assessment of Individual Abilities: Dementia Activities

**Physical: fine and gross motor**
- Walk
- Throw over & under
- Sweep
- Rake
- Dance (identify steps)
- Kick
- Clap
- Rub
- Pat or press, stamp
- Fold
- Cut
- Tear
- Stir
- Shake
- Pick and place
- Write
- Color or paint
- Pour
- Scoop
- Imitate movements

**Cognitive**
- Sort
- Seriate/order
- Comprehend colors
- Match colors
- Match pictures
- Know rhyming words
- Repeat previously learned “memorized materials”
  - Opposites, go-togethers, triplets, clichés,
  - Nursery rhymes, bible passages, states and capitals
  - Math facts
- Read words
- Read sentences, how many?
- Recall historical and geographic information
- Understand letters/alphabet
- Spell
- Focus on a one step task
- Watch a video: no plot

**Communication**
- Make a choice between 2 objects
- Make a yes-no response
- Express a thought
- Express a feeling
- Express an opinion
- Shake hands
- Wave
- Smile
Socialization/response to the environment
- Responds to social interactions with others
- Participate appropriately at spectator activity
- Participates appropriately in controlled social settings
  (meals, parties, special events)
- Responds to objects in the environment
  - Birds, flags flying, airplanes, trees, sunsets, rain, weather
- Make gestures of friendship and caring

Retained habits and skills (work and leisure)
- Demonstrates ability to sing, play instrument
- Moves to music
- Can repeat sound patterns
- Demonstrates retained leisure skill of____________________.
  - needlepoint, cross-stitch, sewing, cooking, sport etc.

Sample “I CAN statements”
- “I can’t remember to fix my coffee or remember to get it…but I can stir it when you give it to me”
- “I can’t tell you about my football games, but I can throw one when you give it to me”
- “I can’t read a book or a story but I can read a few words and maybe a sentence”
- “I don’t know what day it is, but I can say good morning to you”
- “I can’t drive my car anymore, but I can read the road signs when we drive together”
- “I can’t tell you about my WWII experiences but I can see “that thing up there” and I feel proud (flag)”
- “I can’t follow directions but I can follow you and imitate what you do”
- “I can’t have a garden anymore but, I can pick pretty flowers and smell them”

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Opportunities for Meaningful Activity Interactions

- Simplify
- Adapt
- Change the rules
- Use an approach that reinforces the values and identity
- Use personalized “materials”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for Activity Design</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Use procedural memory skills (habitual skills)</td>
<td>Sorting, polishing, shoe shining, shelving, filing, cutting, setting up and preparing, wrapping coins, sports movements, musical instruments, hobby “skills”, things done with the hands (motor activities), puzzles, matching activities, color activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use a variety of sensory triggers (smell, movement, touch, hearing, vision, taste)</td>
<td>Theme kits, What’s in the bag, What’s that sound? Aromatherapy, Lotions, Textures, Discrimination activities, Appreciation of nature and beauty, “warm activities” Videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use objects of special value to trigger reminiscing and life stories</td>
<td>Collages, memory books, video frame, letters, pictures, Google Images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Incorporate individual interests, lifetime pursuits and hobbies</td>
<td>Gardening, games, sewing, collecting, sports, cards, dominoes, cooking, parties, art projects, reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use the preferred music styles and selections to trigger memories and positive emotions</td>
<td>Listening, singing, games (song toss, name that tune, song titles), trivia, reminiscing, drumming circles, rhythm activities, relaxation, spirituality, watching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Create opportunities for movement</td>
<td>Walking, creative movements, props, clapping, dancing, one step action games (target games such as bowling, shooting, tossing, pitching, throwing) parachute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Create opportunities to use social skills, set up familiar social settings</td>
<td>“Share and visit” Penny Ante, Teas, Coffee Break, Ice Cream Parlor, Kitchen Table, Lunch Hour, TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Design opportunities for the expression of thoughts, opinions and creativity</td>
<td>Poetry, Story Telling, You be the Judge, What is your advice? Opinion polls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Create activities in different formats using “known information”
   WOF, crosswords, fill in the last line or word, trivia, clichés of topics

10. Present activities that help promote order such as sorting and categorizing
    Household, office, sports, food, occupations, money, magazine scavenger hunts, collages
    Greeting cards, post cards

11. Provide written cues in a simple format
    Song sheets (color coded), agendas, TV schedules, Music selections, Recipe and cooking instructions, 
    scrapbook “readers”

12. Use “universal” themes when simplifying to preserve dignity
    Patriotic, spiritual, nature, animals, color

13. Present activities that reinforce the personality and involvement patterns
    Introvert or Extrovert, Creative or Routine,

14. Integrate music, movement and humor into all activity interactions
    Funny stories, Silly actions, Laughter yoga

15. Plan opportunities to follow usual daily routines
    Normalization activities (care of self and care of the environment)

**Skills for Engagement: Applying the Knowledge**
- Use declarative sentences, scripts and stories to INITIATE action
- Provide clues in the statement/question
- Trigger thoughts through “I” (first person) statements and stories
- Rephrase communication to solicit feelings and opinions, ask for advice
- Redesign activities to promote strengths
- Structure the visitation environment. Take something

**Attitudes for Engagement and Activity Connections**

“I’m in here….. the HEART Remembers”