


**California Central Coast Chapter**

**Santa Barbara County**  
1528 Chapala St., #204  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
Tel: 805.892.4259

120 E. Jones St, #113  
Santa Maria, CA 93454  
Tel: 805.636.6432

**San Luis Obispo County**  
71 Zaca Ln Suite 110  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
Tel: 805.547.3830

**Ventura County**  
2580 E. Main St Suite 201  
Ventura, CA 93003  
Tel: 805.494.5200

24-Hour Helpline:  
**800.272.3900**

alz.org/CaCentral

## The Name of the Game is I like it like that!

By Marcy Maler, MMFT, Art Therapy  
Education & Care Specialist

Maintaining activities for people who have dementia is important. Staying active may help prevent other illnesses, preserve their sense of importance in the family dynamic, and reinforce a sense of meaning in their lives. While progressive dementia affects parts of the brain involved with mental and physical activities, it is still possible to have memorable times, filled with happiness, and joy with your loved one.

Following are ideas for enjoyable activities to do with your loved one at home or when visiting them in a nursing care setting.

As a caregiver, friend, or family member of a person with dementia, your understanding of the progression of the disease helps you to better identify the person's activity needs and abilities so as to plan appropriate activities for the particular stage he is in. Not everyone experiences symptoms in the same way, so think of these suggestions as general guidelines, not rules. Above all, be flexible and accommodate your loved one's attention and capabilities on any particular day. **Adapt the activity and your expectations so as to create a positive experience, disregarding the end result.**

### Early Stage:

Someone at this stage may exhibit mild memory loss, forgetting things such as appointments or phone calls despite their constantly rechecking their calendars. They may begin to have problems with language, showing difficulty in finding words. Still having full capacity of self-care tasks, your loved one may have trouble paying bills. Sequencing and preparing meals may become more difficult. Changes in personality may be expressed as anxiety, depression, apathy, and loss of initiative.

### Suggested Activities:

Encourage your loved to do daily routines and interact with others; laughter is therapeutic. Enjoy tea and card parties, and engage in word games, board games, and puzzles. Make a scrapbook or video together, cook together, and spend time



outside in the garden or on walks. Play "name that tune" to familiar music. Take time to read and talk about the daily newspaper and discuss current events. Involve all senses; taste, touch smell, sight, and hearing. Use memory-triggering phrases and sayings such as "early to bed, early to rise" and let them fill in the rest (makes a man, healthy, wealthy, and wise).

### Middle Stage:

Someone at this stage may show signs of increased confusion and a shorter attention span. She may repeat the same question over and over and occasionally fail to recognize friends and family. Difficulty solving problems becomes apparent, and a declining awareness of their own cognitive change or ability will surface. Your loved one may be at a risk for accidents, falls, and abuse at this stage. Further, his difficulty with communication may increase, and he may have difficulty following instructions. Disorientation and wandering may become a safety issue, and he may show signs of indifference to personal care, bathing, dressing and hygiene. Suspiciousness, irritability, restlessness, and compulsive behaviors are more common at this stage as is a decline in social etiquette.

### Suggested Activities:

This is a good time to keep in contact and maintain friendships. Listening to favorite music, and sing-along to favorites can bring joy and laughter. Sorting and matching games or objects is a great activity as well as filling a bag with ordinary or familiar items and ask him to reach in the bag and guess what the object is. Folding clothes, sweeping, setting a table

*Continued on next page*

(with more cues) can be entertaining. It is always nice to visit a park, and continue to discuss current events from the newspaper.

**Late Stage:**

In the late stage you may find severe memory loss, however, your loved one may still recognize a photo of himself at a younger age. You may find that every visit is the “first” visit, and there is little or no recognition of days, weeks, or months. Accidents and falls are more likely, and there will be less verbal communication. Your loved one may start sleeping more, and will become dependent on others for care. Her mood may be completely passive, and, if experiencing agitation, there may be some pain or discomfort.

**Suggested Activities:**

Keep visiting and talking; repeat yourself often. Provide different fabrics to touch and hold, bean bags are particularly nice objects to manipulate; stuffed animals offer stimulation and comfort. Folding laundry is easily accomplished. Hanging art or a mobile above their bed, or tying a helium balloon to the wheelchair to play with. Gentle massage, brushing her hair while reminiscing to music or watching home movies engages all the senses. Prepare and share a memory box filled with old family photos and other valued objects. Being mindful about your loved one’s ability to swallow, it is nice to provide him with food items with different textures, sizes, and taste. Many people in the later stages benefit from finger foods and small, frequent portions. Pet therapy, touch therapy, aroma therapy and holding hands are welcomed activities at this stage. If still possible, a ride in the car is both stimulating and fun. It is always nice to sit wrapped in the sunshine together, spending time outside.

As dementia progresses, people will lose the ability to perform a task with many steps but they can stay involved if you simplify the steps. Mix cookie dough in advance and ask her to put spoonfuls of dough on the cookie tray. Most importantly, have some cookies ready to eat and plenty of milk to drink!



Adapting to the Needs of Your Loved One

By changing and adapting an activity as the person progresses through the disease stages, you can make any type of activity available and meaningful. The following tools show how to adapt an activity to the person’s needs and interests at each stage of dementia.



**Tools**

**Cards and Board Games**

Your loved one can still enjoy cards and board games if you make them simple and less complex.

**Prior objective:** Most games have rules. There is an objective and someone wins.

**New objective:** There are no rules, no fixed objectives, and nobody wins.

**Early stage:** Play the game without all the rules and regulations if the person gets frustrated. Keep playing the game even if it is the wrong way to play. Follow his version of the rules. Enjoy being together.

**Middle stage:** Match the cards or pass the cards back and forth. Discuss the colors and type of card. Move playing pieces around the board. Ask your loved one to help you in playing a game with others of the same level or capacity. Some people may be able to play a favorite game “correctly.”

**Late stage:** Hold the playing cards or distribute them on the table; look at or talk about the game board or playing pieces. Talk about the people who they used to play with (reminisce).

**Spirituality and Religion**

Faith and spirituality of any religion can be important to a senior. Utilize his memory of his denomination. This is not, however, a time to try to convert your loved one to a different religion. Stick with what he knows.

**Early stage:** Go with your loved one to her religious establishment. Watch a religious program on television. Initiate prayer and sing favorite hymns together.

**Middle stage:** Conduct a short service at home or arrange for a service in your home. In your service, you may want to start with a hymn your loved one would recognize, read a traditional verse, say a prayer, using familiar religious symbols. There are also masses that can be seen on television.

**Late stage:** Play or sing songs of your loved one’s faith. Use familiar religious symbols he can see and touch. You may be the only one able to participate, but your loved one will still receive joy and comfort. Read a religious text. Keep all activities short. Make it a very personal and hands-on service.