

Forget-Me-Not Spotlight

Activities to Do with Your Parent Who Has Alzheimer's Dementia

By Judith A. Levy, EdM, OTR

“My loved one has Alzheimer's (or another form of dementia)! They just can't/won't do anything!” These statements may be made by you or someone who is caring for a person living with dementia. But they are NOT true!

Too often, people with dementia, whether at home, in assisted living or a long-term care community, are under-stimulated and unengaged in life. Meaningful activities – those that engage the person's attention and connect with their interests- are critical in the care of those living with dementia. Research has shown that people living with dementia that are stimulated and engaged have less challenging behaviors of the disease, lessening the stress of their caregivers. Also, the time families spend with their loved one who is engaged and stimulated is often more positive and enjoyable.

Ms. Levy has worked as an occupational therapist for more than forty years in geriatric care centers, home care, and hospitals. She has worked with children and adults suffering from strokes, fractures, as well as arm and hand injuries. After her mother was diagnosed with dementia, she suddenly no longer was the professional, but the child of a parent living with dementia. This situation made her no longer objective, and put her occupational therapist role to use developing activities for her mother and others living with dementia.

In this book, Ms. Levy will help you, the caregiver or family member, to decide where and when to do an activity, how difficult an activity should be, and whether an activity needs to be altered for your loved one. She gives you ways to determine what activities may be interesting, what time of day would be best and other areas that you need to consider.

If your loved one enjoyed certain activities before dementia, there are ways to let them continue their enjoyment. For example: If they gardened their whole life, but

cannot now bend over to plant vegetables, get a window box or large pot that they can plant flowers or small vegetables in and let them sit at a table outside to do that!

Activities with your loved one should be enjoyable, never frustrating! You may find that one activity may be frustrating for your loved one. Levy recommends assessing the situation – Why isn't it working? Are they hungry or physically uncomfortable? Would they rather be outside? Are they too tired? Ask them or see if you can decipher from their nonverbal communication.

She offers an assessment sheet after each activity. You can use this to document how well the activity went and if you need to change something or did change it. Use these to help other family members or caregivers know what you did and how well your loved one enjoyed it.

At the end of the book are Activity Resources and Safety Assessments as well as additional suggestions.

Try some of these activities with your loved one for a very enjoyable experience!

This book is available at the Newton Public Library from the Forget-Me-Not Resource Center. If you do not have a library card, it can be checked out under Newton Forget-Me-Not.

Review by Shannon Nosbisch, co-founder of Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness