



Moments That Matter

INNOVATIVE DEMENTIA ACTIVITIES THAT WORK

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Session Objectives

- 1) Understand what makes an activity therapeutic rather than just busy work
- 2) Learn how to design dementia friendly programs that truly engage
- 3) Practice adapting activities for different stages of dementia
- 4) Leave with tools you can immediately use in your activity program


People with Dementia NEED what you were created to do.



Light bringers.



Magic makers.



We give them
reasons to wake
up in the morning.

Exercise #1: A Moment That Mattered

- ▶ Think of a recent moment when you felt joyful or fully present
- ▶ A moment where you were not checking your phone
- ▶ A moment that pulled you into the here and now
- ▶ Hold that moment in your mind



How Did You Feel

*What did you feel
in your body in that moment?*

*Did you
feel calm,
excited,
peaceful, or
energized?*

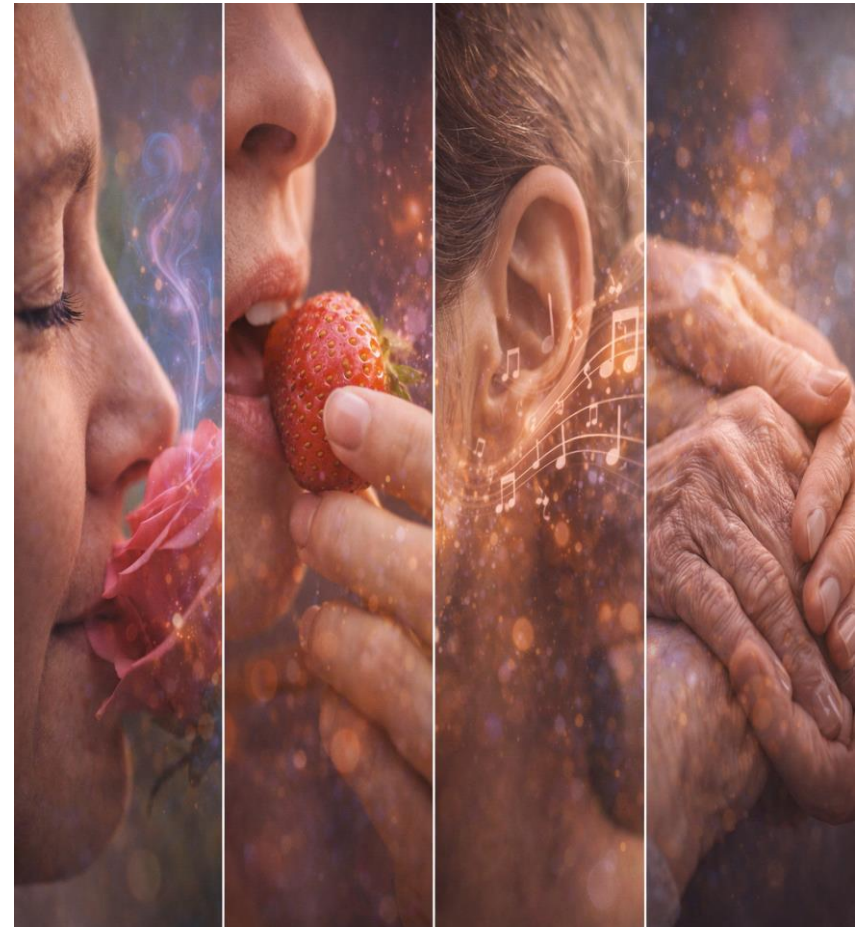
*Did time feel like it
slowed down or sped up?*

*Notice what
comes up for you?*



Engaging the Senses

- ▶ What did you smell in that moment?
- ▶ What did you taste or have in your mouth?
- ▶ What sounds did you hear around you?
- ▶ Were there any textures you remember?



Where and With Whom

- ▶ Where were you when this moment happened?
- ▶ Who were you with or were you alone?
- ▶ What made you feel safe or connected?
- ▶ What helped you stay present?



Why This Moment Mattered

*Why do you think
this moment stuck
with you?*



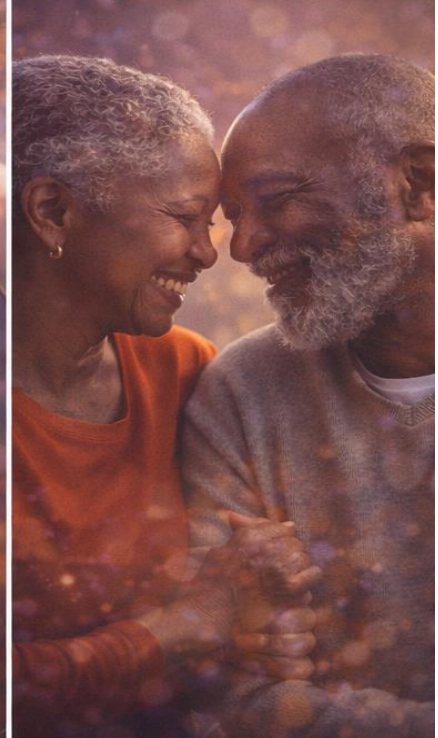
*What made it
meaningful?*



*What would
have interrupted
or ruined it?*




*What made it
different from
everyday moments?*



Why This Matters in Dementia Care

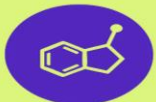
- ▶ People may forget the activity itself
- ▶ The brain remembers how it felt
- ▶ Sensory experiences anchor emotions
- ▶ This is what we aim to create



“People will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget
how you made them feel.”

— *Maya Angelou*

PLEASURE AND ENJOYMENT



DOPAMINE



SEROTONIN



ENDORPHINS



NOREPINEPHRINE

Joanna 
DEMENTIA EXPERT

★ What Brings a Dopamine Hit?

Dopamine is released when something feels rewarding, exciting, satisfying, or familiar. These experiences create motivation and help the brain say: "Yes. This feels good. Let's keep going."

Here are the biggest dopamine triggers:

- ★ 1. Music They Love
- ★ 2. Accomplishing a Simple Task
- ★ 3. Being Praised or Encouraged
- ★ 4. Familiar Routines
- ★ 5. Food & Flavor
- ★ 6. Novelty (but in small doses)
- ★ 7. Social Interaction
- ★ 8. Movement & Rhythm
- ★ 9. Touch
- ★ 10. Seeing Something Beautiful
- ★ Why this matters

All About Dopamine:

What Brings a Serotonin Boost?

Serotonin supports calm, contentment, emotional stability, and a sense of safety. It is released when someone feels secure, soothed, regulated, and connected.

Below are the biggest serotonin triggers

- 1 Sunlight
 - 2 Calm, predictable routines
 - 3 Comforting touch
 - 4 Gentle sensory experiences
 - 5 Warm connection with others
 - 6 Moments of gratitude or appreciation
 - 7 Feeling safe and supported
 - 8 Nature
 - 9 Music that soothes
 - 10 Smiling, laughing, or shared joy
- ★ Why This matters

All About Serotonin:

What Brings an Endorphin Releases

Endorphins ease discomfort, reduce stress, and boost wellbeing.

- ★ 1. Laughter
- ★ 2. Music & Singing
- ★ 3. Movement & Exercise
- ★ 4. Dancing (even seated)
- ★ 5. Positive Physical Touch
- ★ 6. Warmth
- ★ 7. Creative Expression
- ★ 8. Aromatherapy
- ★ 9. Social Bonding & Shared Moments
- ★ 10. Small Successes

★ Why this matters

Endorphins help residents feel comfortable and relaxed.

All About Endorphins:

What Brings a Norepinephrine Boost?

Norepinephrine the brain's energy and alertness chemical. It increases focus, attention, readiness, motivation, and the ability to respond to what's happening around us.

Below are the 10 strongest norepinephrine triggers

-  **Bright Light**
-  **Novel Sensory Input**
-  **Purposeful Activity**
-  **Social Energy**
-  **Novel Visuals**
-  **Elevated Emotion (Positive Excitement)**
-  **Temperature Changes (Gentle)**

 **5 Movement**

 **Elevated Emotion (Positive Excitement)**

 **Temperature Changes (Gentle)**

 **Rhythmic Sound**

 **Challenge + Support**

 **8 Why this matters**

When you give someone with dementia a dopamine hit, you get:

All About Norepinephrine:

Exercise #2:

Chasing the Feel Good



Dopamine



Endorphins



Serotonin



Norepinephrine

Find an activity that produces each chemical.

The BEST activity for people with dementia : Purposeful Activities



Activities With Purpose



Activities should meet a physical emotional or cognitive need



Purposeful activities reduce distress and increase engagement



Almost any activity can be therapeutic with the right approach



Meaning matters more than perfection

Therapeutic vs Diversional Activities



Therapeutic activities have intention and meaning



Diversional activities simply fill time



The same activity can be either depending on how it is offered



Your approach determines the outcome

Exercise #3: Name That Therapeutic Benefit:



Open the book to any page as a group



Identify what skill the activity supports







Discuss why this activity works for dementia



Talk about how you would adapt it for your residents

Activities for Early Dementia

Example Activities

-  Outings such as coffee shops, lunch dates or community events
-  Baking or cooking projects with choice
-  Movement based activities like walking, dancing or **chair yoga**
-  Reminiscence and conversation based activities

How to Modify:

- Offer choices and decision making
- Encourage independence and leadership
- Build activities around identity and past roles
- Focus on mastery and purpose



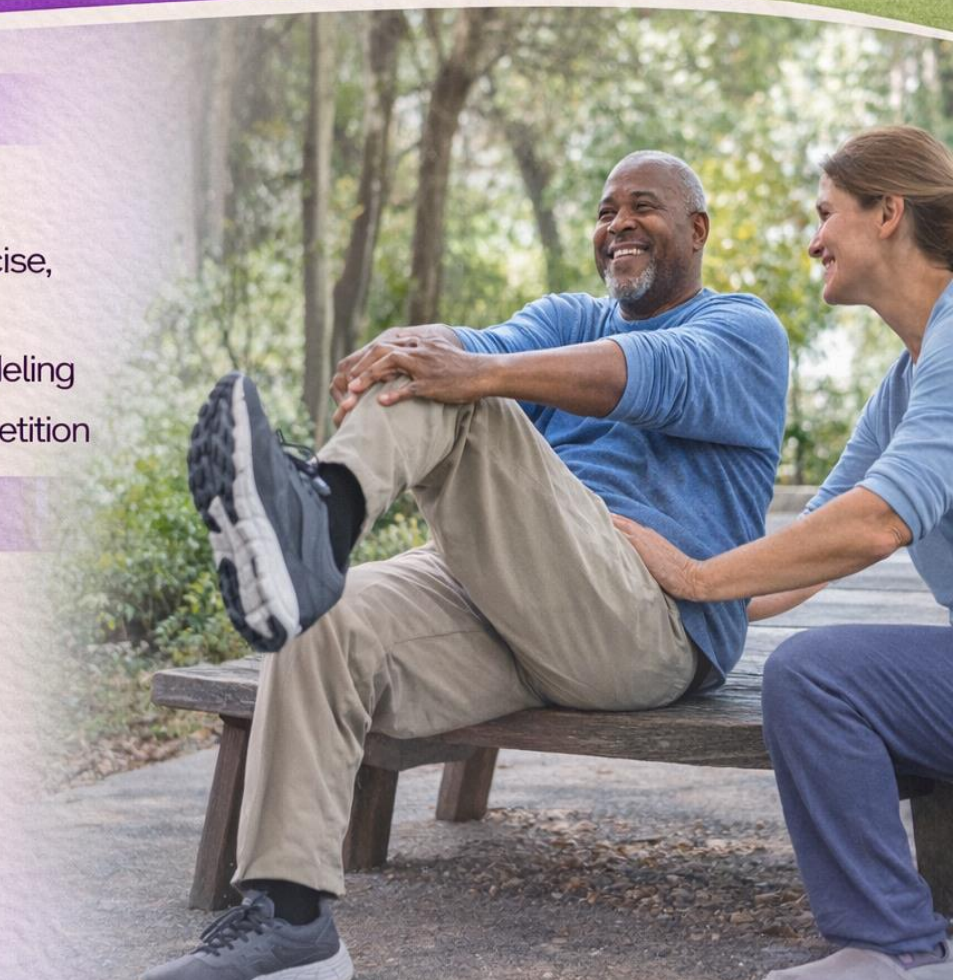
Activities for Moderate Dementia

☞ Example Activities

- 📍 Short structured outings with support
- 👤 Guided movement such as seated exercise, stretching or dancing
- 🍳 Hands-on cooking or food prep with modeling
Simple crafts or themed activities with repetition

☞ How to Modify:

- Break activities into clear simple steps
- Demonstrate each step before inviting participation
- Narrate the experience as it happens
- Keep routines predictable and calm



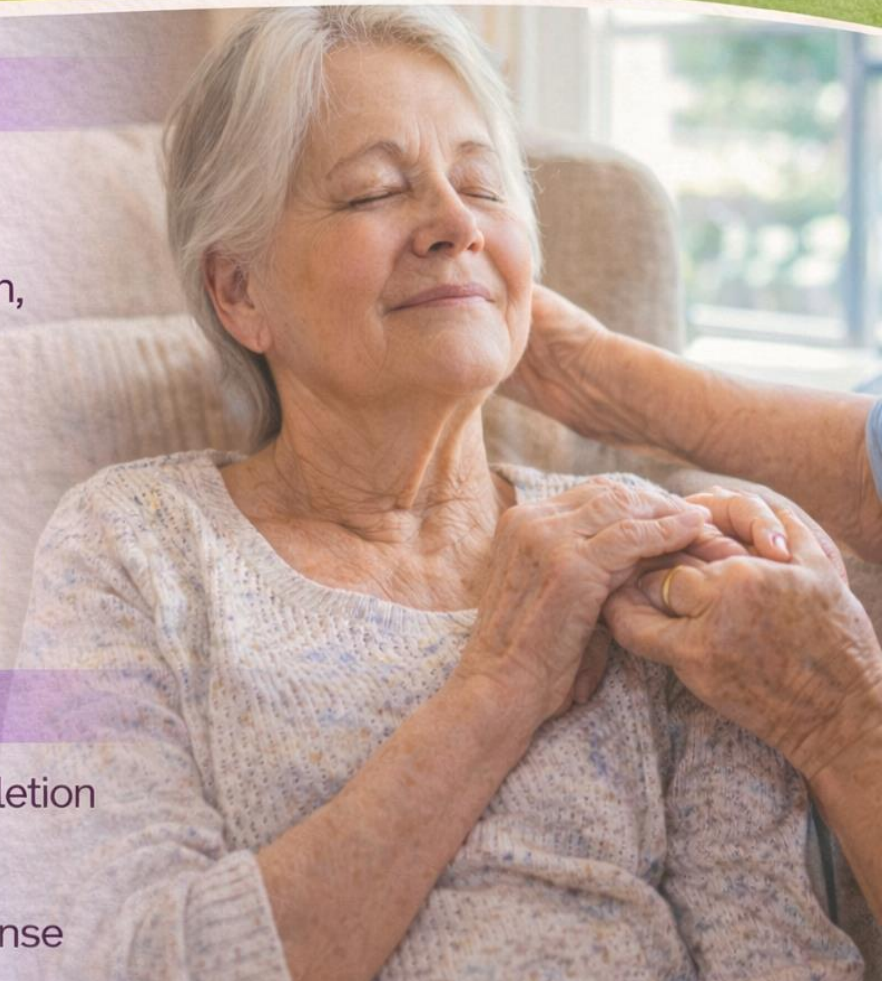
Activities for Later Stage Dementia

🍃 Example Activities

- 🍴 Taste testing and familiar foods
- 🧴 Self care such as hand massage, lotion, brushing hair or spa moments
- 🕯️ Sensory activities involving smell, touch, and sound
- 🌀 Gentle movement like range of motion or guided, hand movements

🍃 How to Modify:

- Focus on sensory experience not completion
- Offer hand over hand support
- Remove expectations for verbal response



One Activity. Three Stages.

How great activities adapt across dementia stages

At your table:

- 1 Choose **one** favorite activity you already love to run
- 2 Work together to adapt it for:
 - Early stage dementia
 - Moderate stage dementia
 - Later stage dementia

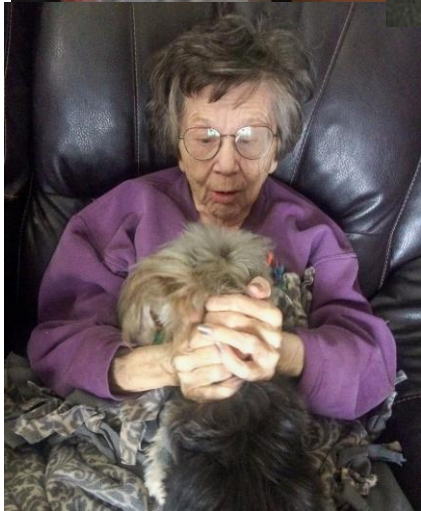
? For *each* stage, ask yourselves:

- What stays the same about this activity?
- What needs to be simplified or supported?
- How does participation change?
- What is the “feeling” we are aiming for?

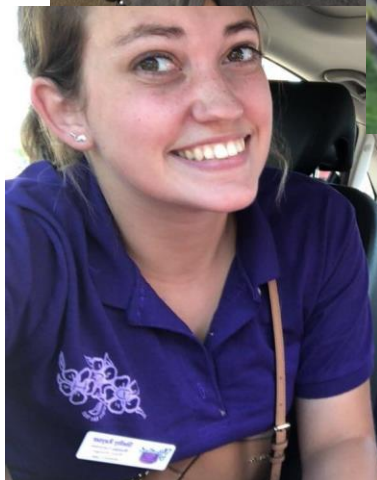
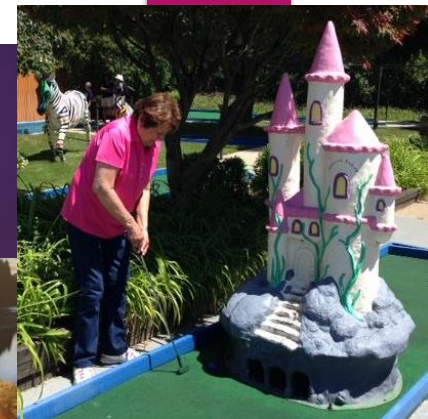


The goal is not to change the activity.
The goal is to change the support.

Self Care Activities I Love:



Don't Sleep on Outings



Engagement Strategies:

- ▶ GET EXCITED!!!!!!
- ▶ DON'T ASK
- ▶ Give them a Choice (that is healthy)
- ▶ Ask for Help
- ▶ Make them feel special
- ▶ Use something you know they like
- ▶ Make it Must See/Must Do
- ▶ Just Do It and Invite them to Join



Before You Plan Your Dementia Calendar...

Think back to your **Moment That Mattered** and ask yourself:

- How do I want them to feel?
- What do I want them to experience in their body?
calm, energy, comfort, joy, connection
- What senses can I engage?
smell, taste, touch, sound, movement
- What will make them feel safe and successful?
- Where is the opportunity for connection?
- What would make this moment worth waking up for?

The image shows a spiral-bound calendar titled 'ACTIVITIES CALENDAR' with handwritten entries. A yellow sticky note is placed over the 9th and 10th. A green pen and three highlighters are also visible on the calendar.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Cook Together	2 Reminiscence & Treats	3	4 Take a Walk	5
7	8	9 Plant Together	10 Salon Visit	11	12
14	15 Outing: Lunch at	16 Salon	17 Take a Walk		19
21	22 Strawberry Mocktails	23 Sing-Along	24 Garden Walk	24	25
28	29 Bake Fridge Cookies	30	31	31	

How to Connect With Me:

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Bringing Joy Everyday

A Year of Dementia-
Friendly Activities

Written by:
Joanna LaFleur

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