

SIMPLE ACTIVITIES

Suggestions of Adult Activities that Support Cognitive Abilities

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TO KEEP IN MIND

1. A person with cognitive changes or many cognitive needs may have difficulty performing tasks or activities that are complex or unfamiliar.
2. Adults may be more successful with activities they have performed **throughout most of their lives**.
3. Activities that are **simple, adult like, normal, and meaningful** are usually more successful and more likely to foster self-esteem and competency. It is usually best to avoid child-like games and objects.
4. Nearly **any activity** can be **adapted** to the level and type of cognitive abilities (that is, skills) this person has, no matter how many cognitive needs this person has or how difficult many cognitive abilities may be for them.
5. Most of the activities that will likely be easier for a person with many cognitive needs to at least participate in are those of **self-care** (dressing, grooming, bathing, etc.), **household tasks** (washing dishes, vacuuming, raking leaves, folding laundry, sanding foot stools, etc.), and **recreational activities** that they have enjoyed throughout most of their adult life. These are likely activities they can more easily recognize as useful and familiar.
6. The suggestions listed here are for a person with **significant or multiple cognitive needs** (for example a person living with moderate to severe dementia). They are activities this person might enjoy and feel comfortable doing or at least participating in. These are some of many possible ideas.
7. Most of these activities will likely **require assistance**, at least to set up the activity. A person might **participate in** only **simple parts** of the task.
8. The activities are listed generally in the order in which they are likely to appeal to a person, because they are **simpler, more familiar, and more obviously useful**.
9. **The activities most likely to be successful are listed first** and the activities most likely to become too difficult over time as cognitive needs grow are listed at the end.
10. Of course, **each person is unique** so any activity this person **enjoys** (as long as it is safe) is best.
11. See other **CAIS handouts** (especially #31 about **simplifying a complex task**) and *Cognitive Abilities and Intervention Strategies (CAIS) Questions to Ask* and *CAIS Intervention Strategies for Task and Daily Routines* and the *Respect* section in *Communication* at <https://www.improvingmipractices.org>

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

DRESSING AND GROOMING:

12. Fixing/combing hair or a friend's hair
13. Manicure for self or a friend
14. Massaging cream into skin
15. Trying on hats or fun clothes
16. Admiring self in mirror
17. Applying makeup

HOUSEHOLD TASKS:

18. Dusting
19. Dry Mopping
20. Sweeping
21. Vacuuming
22. Polishing silver

23. Cooking and baking
24. Arranging serving trays of food or drinks
25. Setting the table
26. Serving meals
27. Washing and drying dishes
28. Folding towels, laundry, napkins, children's clothes (if adult's is too big to fold or see the whole item)
29. Shaking out towels, laundry, tablecloths, clean throw rugs, etc.
30. Making beds
31. Watering plants
32. Raking leaves
33. Trimming bushes
34. Gardening and digging holes
35. Repairing small stools
36. Sanding small stools or other recognizable objects made of wood
37. Sorting hardware (nails, screws, nuts, etc.), buttons, holiday cards, coupons, etc.
38. Cutting coupons
39. Feeding and grooming pets
40. Feeding birds in a bird feeder

RECREATIONAL:

41. Singing
42. Playing a familiar or simple musical instrument
43. Listening to music (perhaps through headphones)
44. Reciting or listening to old poems and familiar stories
45. Fill in blanks of old proverbs or sayings
46. Spelling
47. Dancing
48. Playing simple card games
49. Sorting playing cards
50. Conversing about items: in a "theme basket", in the environment, old items (e.g., antique farm implements), personal photographs, clothes which need mending or laundering
51. Conversing about advice to give younger people
52. Exercise to music individually or in groups
53. Volleyball with a big light ball
54. Moving arms and making waves with a large cloth (e.g., bed spread, large towel)
55. Walking indoors or outdoors
56. Kicking a ball
57. Feeling a variety of textures
58. Looking through magazines, books, newspapers, cards, jewelry, etc.
59. Stuffing and unstuffing envelopes
60. Folding papers
61. Hosting and serving at a tea party or other celebration/gathering

HOBBIES AND CRAFTS:

62. Wrapping yarn around cardboard or into a ball
63. Sanding wood (e.g., a disconnected table leg)
64. Arranging flowers

SOURCES:

- Weaverdyck, S.E. (1991) Intervention to Address Dementia as a Cognitive Disorder. Chapter 13 in D. Coons (Ed.) Specialized Dementia Care Units. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Weaverdyck, S.E. (1999) Activities: A Key to Pleasure for Clients with Dementia. Home Health Aide Digest, 5(6), 10-12, November-December, 1999.