

Dementia Care Best Practices

- Approach from the front.
- Approach slowly with a pleasant, calm facial expression.
- Introduce yourself.
- Maintain eye contact, without being intrusive.
- Read the person's cues to determine the most comfortable distance.
- Allow time for a personal connection before making a request.
- Speak in short sentences, ie, one-element sentences.
- Adapt the loudness of your voice as needed.
- Maintain a pleasant facial expression and tone of voice.
- Allow time for processing and responding.
- Don't talk too much or too fast.
- Be comfortable with silence.

You may find people paying more attention to how you something than what you say.

Environmental Modifications to Facilitate Elders' Independent Reading

Decrease Environmental Distractions

- Decrease background noise (TV, music, voices).
- With the reader's consent, position them where they can't see people moving around them.

Lighting

- Maximize lighting above and behind.

Not facing a window.

- Bright light in front of them darkens the page and creates glare.
- Seniors have great difficulty filtering out glare.

Postural Support

- Close to the table.
- Table height at or above elbows.
- Pillow/cushion behind back - no hunching over.
- Elbows and wrists supported, e.g. on armrests or table.

Book Placement

- The book should be raised at an angle, not lying flat on the table.
- A book can be propped on a book stand or the edge of the table.

Eyeglasses

- Check that the glasses are clean.
- If the reader is struggling to see the text, you may want to give them the provided Reading Screen to determine if they see the text better with or without their glasses.

Reviving the Joy of Reading for Memory Challenged Adults

Introduce the Book

- Gentle comments are often better than direct questions.
- Show them the book as you suggest it.
- Preview the book.

Independent vs Social Reading

- They may need someone beside them the whole time to help them focus and/or manage the book.
- Or they may need guidance initially and then become more independent readers with time.
- Or they may only be able to enjoy the book on their own. They may feel uncomfortable reading with someone near them.

Read their cues and adjust.

Let Readers Explore Books as They Wish

If they appear anxious and looking for guidance, direct them. Otherwise, let them explore the book in any way they wish:

- they may linger on a page for many minutes.
- they may not look at pages in order.
- they may go from picture, to text, to picture, repeatedly.
- they may read from the bottom of the page to the top, etc.

If you get the feeling that they want conversation, then chat away. See what you can learn about who they really are. If they are quietly focused on the book, then it may be best not to engage them in conversation and to give them their time alone with the book. They may be working very hard to read and talking may be distracting for them.

Read their Cues and adjust.

Practical Tips for Facilitating Elders' Independent Reading

After introducing yourself and emotionally connecting with the elder, you may want to use the following phrasing when presenting a book. Keep it casual and low-key.

"This is just some light reading that I thought you might enjoy. Something relaxing to pass the time."

Previewing the book and putting a positive spin on it is helpful. For example,

"This is a book about baking cookies. I thought it was intriguing to learn about where cookies came from and all of the different kinds of cookies. And some of the illustrations are lovely."

If the person seems receptive, you could say as you're setting up the book,

"Take a look and let me know what you think."

It's sometimes not best to ask, *"Would you like to read about ____? Do you like ____?"*

Some people will answer this with a "No." Maybe because they haven't read in so long and they assume they can't read anymore. Maybe they assume they won't be able to see the print. They may suspect this is some kind of assessment. They may be feeling cantankerous, often for good reason. Or they may simply not be interested in the subject of the book.

Some people may frequently ask orientation questions during the reading activity, for example,

“What is this for? What is this about? What are we supposed to be doing? What do you want us to do here? Why are we doing this?”

Always answer them calmly and cheerfully as if you’re hearing it for the first time. E.g.,

“Oh, this is just some light reading we thought you might be interested in. Just to pass the time.”

“I saw this little booklet and thought you might like to take a look.”

Usually you’ll notice that the questions become less frequent and that after a few times, the person will recognize your answer and feel more at ease, saying, “Oh yes, I remember you said that.”

As with any activity, if you see distress, confusion, or frustration increasing, it is best to respond to their needs, and to find a situation or activity to replace the books. There will be some people who are not interested in these books or who have difficulty staying still or focusing.

Consistent with person-centered support, staff/family members may want to survey the materials, evaluate the environment, and assess the style of interaction to help determine if any situational changes are needed. Of course, one should also always consider the impact of the person’s current medical status or physical comfort when their response is not a positive one.

FAQ about Reading and Dementia

Can people with dementia read?

Reading is a skill that is generally preserved and intact in the procedural memory of an elderly person. Like brushing teeth or using a spoon, the ability to read is automatic and often remains to some degree functional even in the later stages of dementia.

Why do adults with memory challenges stop reading?

Despite having the retained ability to read, most people with dementia and other neurogenic conditions stop reading in the early stages of their disease. Generally, their reluctance to read is not because they can't read, but because they can't read conventional published material. Their deficits in areas related to reading (such as ocular motor control, light perception, simultaneous processing, working memory and attention) make reading mainstream newspapers, magazines and books extremely difficult. With its low visual contrast, condensed text, extraneous visual stimuli and lengthy syntax, everyday reading material can become inaccessible.

Besides cognitive impairments, environmental factors (e.g., low lighting, poor book placement and background noise), physical symptoms (e.g., pain, discomfort, fatigue, hunger, thirst, weak postural support) and psychological experiences (e.g., anxiety, confusion) also negatively impact many older adults' abilities to concentrate on reading.

What do some seniors need in order for them to read?

Modifications to the reading material in regards to text, graphic layout, illustrations, language and content can compensate well for a reader's visual and cognitive deficits. Making these adaptations without compromising the intelligence of the literary work and without creating a juvenile quality to the work is critical.

(continued...)

Caregivers' sensitivity to and understanding of the older adult's immediate environment, physical comfort and emotional state are also necessary for some seniors' reading success, especially if the senior reader cannot clearly express his/her needs.

What makes Reading2Connect books different?

Our books are designed to ease the reading process while maintaining intelligent content and adult-level vocabulary. Below are a few of the adaptations incorporated in each book.

Because these books can lay flat when open and are made of heavy paper, manipulating the pages is easier. High visual contrast, wide margins and spaced out text facilitate visual tracking, rereading, and the ability to organize one's thoughts. Short, direct sentences and one theme per book decrease the burden on working memory. Large, clear photographs and the fact that each page can be read independently make the books easy to share with others and help to compensate for limited attention.

How do we know they are reading?

Determining reading accuracy and comprehension level of some memory-challenged adults may not be a needed area of focus. Nurturing engagement with the text and enjoyment of a book is often more important than assessing conventional reading.

As is true for any reader, adults with degenerative conditions can interact with a book in many ways, for example by focusing on the pictures, decoding without comprehension, rereading one section, reading out of sequence, or randomly exploring the pages with intermittent reading. Signs of engagement with the text include visual focus, visual tracking, mouthing of the words, reading aloud, turning pages, commenting, smiling, and laughing. We all can derive enjoyment and mental stimulation from books in a variety of ways.

How do seniors benefit from reading?

Research shows that the cognitive stimulation of processing written material can slow down the progression of dementia and the decline of language skills. Reading connects older adults with their memories, their sense of self, their loved ones and the world at large.

Professionals and families report that well-chosen reading material lessens the reader's feelings of boredom, depression, restlessness and anxiety. Books can be calming and shift one's focus to positive thoughts. As an autonomous activity, reading can enhance one's self-image.

Why encourage reading?

If an adult is engaging with a book in some way, then that book is stimulating some degree of cognitive-language processing. The adult is most likely experiencing to some extent rekindled memories, autonomy, conversation and amusement. The primary goals of making written material accessible to seniors with limited memory is to provide a pleasurable activity and to stimulate thought processes.

Books also provide a platform for discussion and sharing. With conversation sparked by books, caregivers see the person behind the disease more clearly. They naturally become more invested and more personal in their care for that person. Adult children visiting their parents see adapted books as a means of bringing them closer to their parents and making their visits more interactive and pleasurable.

Finally, when sharing and discussing literature, seniors express views, landscapes and voices that one would not hear from other age groups. We can all benefit from the quiet, contemplative thoughts of those with the most life experience.

The voices of our eldest citizens are worthy of our attention.

Yes we can

80

White snow

60

Subtitles in
our Books

The dining room

50

A ham on rye

40

The evening light

30

President Roosevelt

24

Text in
our Books

fields of daisies

12

I can as well 80

The snow storm 60

Subtitles in
our Books

A shiny new car 50

Let's go dance 40

A mighty elm tree 30

Dining room chats 24

Text in
our Books

a chocolate cake 12