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Making Sense

Sensory stimulation activities and tips.**Subscriber Resources**

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Note: This page (listed in the left-hand column of the monthly index page as "Making Sense/One-to-One") alternates between sensory stimulation activities and one-to-one activities. Look for "One-to-One" next month.

Spring Cleaning Sensory Kit

~ by Haley Burress

Springtime means it is time to shake out the rugs and air out the house. Use this kit to stimulate the senses and get people talking about spring cleaning.

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Goal of the Sensory Kit

The goal of the sensory kit is to provide a variety of interesting, theme-oriented stimuli (for a variety of ability levels) that will enhance the sensory environment and encourage a memory tie-in to the sensory experience.

Begin with a large basket, mop bucket, or dish pan.

Fill it with things that appeal to all the senses – including things to look at, feel, smell, taste, and listen to. Here are some possibilities:

- ★ Feather duster (new not used)
- ★ Some cleaning and dust rags
- ★ Broom and dust pan
- ★ Mop (or just the mop head)
- ★ Sponges and scrubbing brushes
- ★ Small hand vacuum
- ★ Rubber gloves
- ★ Apron and bandana
- ★ A small pan of soapy water
- ★ Paper towels
- ★ Crumpled newspaper (Some people clean windows with newspaper.)
- ★ Lemons
- ★ Bottle of vinegar
- ★ Furniture polish (in pump bottle)
- ★ Container of beeswax furniture polish
- ★ Windex or other glass/window cleaner. (If you are worried about chemicals, put a few drops of blue food coloring in water and put it in an empty Windex bottle. It will still evoke memories and serve the purpose of the kit. You can also purchase "green" products made from natural ingredients.)
- ★ A recording of "Whistle While You Work"
- ★ A piece of chocolate or a glass of lemonade as a reward for all of your hard work



Activity Alert: You don't need Windex or furniture polish to make the kit successful. However, if you include these things, closely supervise to make sure the person does not try to drink or eat any of the supplies. Be aware of any allergies and don't use aerosol sprays or pour the cleaning supplies where they might get on a person's skin.

Activity Ideas and Suggestions

Always start the interaction with a short and simple introduction, even if it seems the person doesn't completely understand. It can be a way to add purpose to the activity. You might say, "Spring is in the air, so let's take a look at some of the things we might need to do our spring cleaning."

Then, pass around each item. Use the items to relate to each of the senses. You might not get through all of your items during your group or individual session and that's okay. Take time with each one and you can always use more of your items during your next group.

1. **Visual (see) & Tactile (feel)** – Encourage the person to look at, examine, and feel each item. Ask simple questions as appropriate. (How does it feel? Does the feather duster tickle? Would you say it is soft or hard? How would you describe the shape or the color? What would you call it? What can you use it for? What would you clean with it?)
2. **Olfactory (smell)** – Ask the person to smell the lemons, the bottle of vinegar, or other cleaning supplies. Put a little furniture polish on a cloth and smell it. (How does it smell? Do you like the smell? Do you think it smells "clean"? What might you use it to clean?)
3. **Auditory (hearing)** – Crumple the newspaper and/or turn on the hand vacuum. (What does it sound like? What could be making the sound? Have you ever washed windows with newspaper? Did you have a big vacuum?) Play the song "Whistle While You Work." (Do you know the lyrics? Can you sing along? What movie made the song popular? [*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*])
4. **Proprioception (movement)** – Ask the person to demonstrate how to dust with the feather duster or sweep a floor with a broom. Have them squeeze the lemon or put on/take off the apron or rubber gloves. Have the person tie the bandana around her hair. Dunk a rag in the soapy water and wring it out or ask them to demonstrate how to wash a window or dust a table.
5. **Gustatory (taste)** – Treat everyone to a piece of candy or a glass of lemonade once all of the "spring cleaning" is done. **Activity Alert:** Always check with appropriate staff before any food-related activity.

Discussion Starters

- ★ Did you enjoy doing spring cleaning in your home?
- ★ What kinds of things did you clean? Did you wash all of the windows? Organize your closet? Wash out your refrigerator? Clean your silver? Did you take the rugs outdoors and beat them?
- ★ Did you wash your floors with a mop or on your hands and knees?
- ★ Did anyone help you with spring cleaning?
- ★ When else during the year did you give your home a deep cleaning?
- ★ How did you reward yourself when you were done?



Unresponsive People

Some of the props in this activity can be used when providing one-to-one sensory stimulation activities for people who are severely impaired or even unresponsive. For example, wave the fresh lemon under the person's nose, play the music, or tickle the person's arm with the feather duster. Record any reaction or response.

More Bang for Your Buck

The items in the kit can make for an interesting discussion activity, even with individuals who are not impaired. Since the kit is portable, it can also be used for one-to-one visits.

There's More!

Check out the [Alzheimer's Focus](#) page every month for more activities for people who are cognitively impaired.

Learn about Sensory Programming

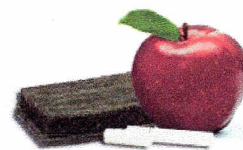
If you would like to learn more about sensory stimulation programming and how to develop a program, check out [Activity Teacher](#). Here you will find a course titled:

Making Sense: Enrichment Sensory Program

Take the class for CE hours or just to learn more about the topic.

Course description

In this course, you will learn how sensory stimulation can raise the quality of care in various types of care facilities and discover the simplest path to creating your own sensory stimulation program. More than just a how-to guide,



this course will explore in depth the concepts behind sensory stimulation programming and troubleshoot potential problems that care providers face when implementing these concepts. Learn important skills like how to create a sensory profile, create object-specific sensory monologues, and explain the tenets of sensory stimulation programming to staff and families.

5 Senses Group

submitted by Theresa Zaffini of Pine Knoll Convalescent Center on Monday, January 7, 2002

Size: 1-7

Equipment: Aroma Therapy, audio therapy, and sensory items.

Objective: This group is for the hard to reach low functioning residents who usually do not respond to any type of stimulation. Our residents have MS, Huntington's Chorea, or have declined physically and are unable to participate independently. This activity offers an opportunity for the resident to get a change in surrounding and reduces contractors and breakdown and hopefully further decline.

Description: We have the nursing staff transport the residents to a dayroom, we have the aroma therapy going, we have a rehab aide that comes in and does upper and lower extremity range of motion. The activity staff reads, provides tactile and sensory stimulation to each resident. We have soft music playing. This a low functioning activity in a small group setting. We monitor each resident closely to see if they provide eye contact, pain response such as; jerking, painful facial expressions, or any verbal response. I hope this idea helps you, I know it is difficult to program for the lower functioning but we have to be the ones to help them maintain any functioning they have left and prolong physical and mental decline. This activity is also nice to include the family members to attend, so often they don't know how to visit with their loved one and this offers a time for them to care for the resident as well have a meaningful visit.

Spring Flowers

Yvonne Lombardi on Wednesday, November 13, 2002

Size: 5-6

Equipment: Assortment of fresh, scented, various colored flowers, large vase, scissors, table protector. (de-thorn roses and have approx. 6 of each flower)

Objective: Enhance sensory stimulation and social discussion, reminiscence. Best with small group. Excellent for people with dementia and visual impairment.

Description: Begin by passing round flowers to each participant. Encourage them to hold and smell each one. Provide little bits of info for each flower, eg. origin, uses, superstitions etc. Encourage them to discuss their gardens, favorite colors, flowers etc. When finished, arrange flowers in vase

Aroma Therapy

submitted by Michele Tarsitano, ATR-BC of Kendal at Oberlin

Size of Group: 1-16

Equipment: essential oils, light bulb diffuser, Book by Valerie Ann Worwood, "The Complete Book of Essential Oils & Aroma therapy

Objective: We have been using aromas to stimulate activity, reduce agitation, assist the cognitively impaired in locating rooms, and to stimulate appetites. The Director of Nursing and myself (Director of Creative Arts Therapy) have begun a process to assist our nursing home residents with the most non-evasive treatments possible. The book by Valerie Ann Worwood has been very helpful in methodology. We are still attempting to gather data to publish, for the effectiveness in the use of aroma in our facility.

Description: For appetite: We purchased a bread machine. Placed in the dining area. 2.5 hours prior to dinner, ingredients are placed in to the machine by residents, and turned on. By dinner time, the smell is waifing down the hallways and residents are lined up to eat! We have slightly increased consumption for some residents.

For room location: Test different smells with the resident. Find one that resident particularly enjoys, or is "drawn to". 10 mins prior to meal ending, before resident goes to room, place essential oil of that resident enjoyed in room on light bulb diffuser, leave door open so that smell will be in hallway. Resident will follow smell to room.

Gadgets & Gizmos on the Go ~ Haley Burress, MS

Generate some curiosity (and maybe some strange looks) with a cart full of gadgets and thingamajigs. It will have everyone who gets a visit saying, "What's that thing?"

Here are some tips for organizing your kit:

- Decorate a utility cart with a sign that says "Gadgets & Gizmos on the Go."
- Add some colorful boxes, bins, and baskets containing different gadgets, perhaps divided into categories - office, kitchen, garden, etc.
- On an index card, write down some information about each item - what it is and what it is used for - along with some possible discussion prompts. See examples below.
- Carry a list of those people who require or desire one-to-one visits, along with any additional information about the person that might be helpful. (For example, do they enjoy gardening or cooking?)
- Fill the cart with all sorts of gadgets and odd things. Here are just [a few photos](#) you can use in case you can't find enough items to fill your cart. Also, if possible, include the things you might need to demonstrate the gadget. For example, you might need an apple to demonstrate an apple peeler or a laptop computer to demonstrate how a flash or jump drive works.



Possible Gadgets & Gizmos

Kitchen gadgets. Look for them at your grocery store or home goods store. You might also take a walk through your community's kitchen and find some interesting items you can borrow. Some suggestions:

- [Melon ballers](#)
- [Apple peeler and corer](#)
- [Egg slicer](#)
- [Corn stripper](#) (Removes several rows of kernels at once and collects them.)
- [Pepper corer](#) (Removes core and seeds from the inside of a pepper.)
- [Salad scissors](#)
- [Shaped ice cube trays](#)



- [Jar openers](#)

Lawn and garden gadgets. Stroll into a garden store or nursery to find some of these interesting gadgets.

- [Upside down tomato planter](#)
- [Lawn Aerator shoes](#) (On an index card, write the description. The long spikes on these sandals penetrate deep into the ground, opening up spaces in compacted soil that let the soil breathe. With more air pockets under the turf, the roots can make better use of water and nutrients. This means a greener, healthier lawn.)
- [Handheld bug zapper](#)
- [Garden knee pads](#)
- [Plant watering globe stake](#)



Other random gadgets. Shop your office supply store, electronic store, or even pet store for other items.

- [Laser pointer](#)
- [Newton's cradle](#)
- Stress ball
- Computer gadgets like a jump (flash) drive
- Electronics like a phone with camera or a GPS device
- Handheld poker machines or other handheld games
- [Diffuser reeds and scent](#)
- [Cat tickle toy](#) (There are lots of pet toys that would be fun to include on your cart.)



Tips for doing the activity:

1. Introduce the activity and invite the person to explore the items on the cart. ("What looks interesting?")
2. Make a game of it. ("Do you know what this could be? Do you know how they might be used?") Encourage the person to come up with as many options as possible.
3. Demonstrate the gadget if possible. For example, cut an egg with the egg slicer or open a jar with the jar opener. Discuss similar items. ("What else could you use to open a jar? How about a rubber glove?")
4. "Would you ever use something like this? Why or why not?"

Note: Unresponsive People

Many of the items in this kit can be used with people who are unresponsive (comatose, in the late stages of Alzheimer's disease, etc.). For example, tickle their arm with the cat toy, wave one of the diffuser sticks under their nose, or place the stress ball in their hand and help them manipulate it. Record any responses or reactions.