

# Cognitive Stimulation Activities for Recreational Therapy

## Programming tips for adult patrons who have been diagnosed with dementia, Alzheimer's and/or cognitive disabilities:

Use *people first language* – patrons are people first and should not be defined by any disability or diagnosis they may have.

See page xiii of [Crash Course in Library Service to People with Disabilities](#).

- SAY *people with disabilities* NOT *the handicapped or the disabled*
- SAY *Paul has a cognitive disability (or a diagnosis of autism)*
  - NOT *he's mentally retarded (or autistic or disabled)*
- The correct format to use when address any person is
  - (Person's Name) has (diagnosis)
  - Sarah has Alzheimer's

Helpful guidelines and tips found on page 16 of [Crash Course in Library Service to People with Disabilities](#):

- Treat all library customers with respect and consideration.
- Ask a person with a disability if they need help before helping.
- Do not refer to a person's disability unless it is relevant to the conversation.
- Use people first language.
- If a person has a guide or service animal with them always speak to the person unless told otherwise and always ask permission before interacting with service animals.
- Be descriptive when describing items or locations to people with visual impairments.
- If asked, read instructions verbally to patrons instead of writing them down or using hand gestures.
- Try sitting in a chair to make level eye contact to patrons in wheelchairs.
- Listen carefully and ask people to repeat themselves if you do not understand something a patron has said.
- Face patrons directly when speaking, make eye-contact, speak clearly, enunciate, and use an appropriate tone of voice.
- Be friendly, upbeat and enthusiastic when you present a program.

- Present programs that appeal to all the senses – seniors or people with certain medical conditions may have decreased sense functionality.
- Try to involve everyone in the library program or activity – participants may represent a wide range of abilities, alertness and functionality. Try to have activities that can easily be modified to suite individuals with higher or lower functionality.
- Have patience, remain calm, and repeat information as often as needed.

## Programming Ideas, Crafts and Activities:

**When you do group programming and outreach at adult care facilities remember that patrons diagnosed with cognitive disabilities, dementia and/or Alzheimer’s will display a wide range of symptoms and skill levels. It may take several sessions for you to determine an individual’s activity level and provide programming activities appropriate for that individual.**

**[Discovery Education’s Puzzlemaker](http://www.discoveryeducation.com/free-puzzlemaker/?CFID=15483111&CFTOKEN=59766474) - Free customizable word/number games and puzzles you can print. <http://www.discoveryeducation.com/free-puzzlemaker/?CFID=15483111&CFTOKEN=59766474>**

Use Puzzlemaker to create a simple puzzle or game and distribute it wherever you hold your program. Many people diagnosed with Alzheimer’s / dementia are able to complete easy word puzzles or games in the early stages of their diagnosis. In five minutes or less you can create a puzzle to reflect a particular theme, activity or program. Use the puzzles to encourage cognitive activity.

**Encourage artistic expression** – art is a wonderful way to encourage social interaction, dexterity and cognitive activity. Patrons of all artistic abilities and talents can participate!

- Print adult coloring sheets depicting common household items or basic geometric shapes. Try not to use children’s coloring books that will contain characters or references patrons may not recognize. Coloring sheets work best if they have bold black lines and large blank areas for coloring. Sheets can be colored with crayons, pencils or watercolor paints. Print multiple page styles so each patron can choose the page that best fits their comfort level. Try the free adult coloring sheets available at these websites:
  - [Color Pages for Mom - Free Printable Adult Coloring Pages](http://www.colorpagesformom.com/) These page are a bit more complicated but work well for more advanced artists. Free color pages for adults, choose from more than 250 printable pages at <http://www.colorpagesformom.com/>
  - [The Coloring Castle](http://www.coloringcastle.com/) – try the free [alphabet](#), [number](#), [shape](#), [animal](#), [nature](#), and [food](#) pages to begin with. Once artists master these activities you may want to try the more complicated [Mandala](#) or [compound shape](#) coloring pages. Hundreds of free printable pages to choose from at <http://www.coloringcastle.com>

- [Coloring pages for all ages](#) – Free [Adult Coloring Pages](#) provide intricate designs and more sophisticated themes for your advanced artists. Free printable pages at <http://www.coloring-pages-for-all-ages.com/adult-coloring-pages.html>
- If your patrons don't show an interest in coloring, try providing stickers in a variety of shapes and colors. Avoid children's stickers featuring cartoon characters or objects patrons may not be familiar with. Choose stickers that are large and feature basic shapes, number, letters and common objects found in the home or in nature. Provide blank colored construction paper or printable coloring sheets for patrons to adhere their stickers to. If stickers come in large sheets make sure each sheet has several different stickers or cut each sheet in to strips so patrons get a variety of stickers, not just one sheet of the same thing. Make it a group project by covering a long table with paper from a large roll and have each patron pick a section of the paper colored table to cover or add stickers to.
  - Print free sticker at [sticker and charts](#) if you have access to a color printer and sticky-backed blank label paper stock. Templates at <http://www.stickersandcharts.com>

**Music lifts the spirit** – adding music to your programming can help patrons focus their attention, improve communication, add the element of movement, and trigger memories or feelings of nostalgia.

- Encourage movement in by playing up-tempo songs and having the adults tap out the beat using percussion sticks, tambourines or shakers. Increase movement and activity by adding ribbons or crepe-paper streamers individuals can hold and move with the music. If you feel a group is able, try adding a round of chair dancing to your program. Instructions are available at [eHow Chair Exercises and Dancing for Seniors](#). Get seniors or other low-mobility patrons active with simple chair dances. [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_2175872\\_do-seniors-chair-exercises.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_2175872_do-seniors-chair-exercises.html)
- Create individual or group poetry. Have each person write a short poem and share it with the group by setting the poetry to a familiar tune or children's rhyme. This can also be done as a group activity by encouraging each person to come up with one line for a poem. If the group is not comfortable with this activity, try playing a song or showing a picture and having each person use two or three descriptive words to share what they are feeling when they hear the song / see the picture. Group these words on a blackboard and arrange them in to a poem. Sing the resulting poem to a common tune or childhood rhyme.
- Request the [Musical Memories](#) kit from KDLA and use it to create a music program tailored to the age and skill level of your group. The kit includes a collection of music CDs, books featuring musicians from the past, and a detailed programming guide. Information about the kit is available at <http://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/programs/Pages/KitBrowser.aspx>

**Electronic Gaming** – even patrons with limited computer skills enjoy gaming.

- Wii Gaming – if your library has a Wii try gaming with your patrons. Games like Wii bowling have easy to understand rules. They also encourage movement and dexterity. Look for Wii games designed for seniors or games that can be played in a seated position so they can be adapted to patrons using wheelchairs or other mobility devices. Visit the [Nintendo](#) website at <http://www.nintendo.com> for game ratings.

- [The PBS Living Center](http://www.pbs.org/theforgetting/caregivers/living_center.html) has created a series of free online games intended for use by people with Alzheimer's. The games are specifically designed for caregivers and persons in the late stages of Alzheimer's to share together. Group items, view a classic Sears catalog, or listen to music on your computer.  
[http://www.pbs.org/theforgetting/caregivers/living\\_center.html](http://www.pbs.org/theforgetting/caregivers/living_center.html)

**Literacy for All** – Book related activities for group settings.

- Reading Aloud and Storytelling
  - Avoid long, grim, gloomy or juvenile materials unless they are requested.
  - Try using short vignettes, short stories, folktales, humorous stories, and essays – especially if they focus on holidays or traditions. Think about the kind of stories you might find in a Readers Digest magazine or other traditional short-format magazines and publications.
  - Read the material several times before you present it to the group and be sure to introduce each reading before you start.
  - Be adaptable – you may need to change your reading selection, repeat a story, or stop reading to engage in a discussion.
  - Encourage reminiscing or imagination in patrons by allowing them to tell stories.
- Book talks, discussions and individual reading
  - Illustrated books work well. Select adult titles with large illustrations or collections of photographs. Non-fiction books work best. Popular topics include animals, flowers, children/families, transportation (trains, old cars, airplanes), classic advertising, and food. For some persons with dementia children's books with bold photographs or illustrations may be appropriate. Graphic novels are also a good choice they are heavily illustrated – just make sure the content is appropriate for the audience.
  - For non-illustrated titles use classic children's books, folktales, and low literacy titles. Visit the [KDLA website](http://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/programs/Pages/adultliteracy.aspx) for a list of appropriate low literacy titles about Kentucky's places, people, and events.  
<http://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/programs/Pages/adultliteracy.aspx>
  - Some patrons might respond to audiobooks. Encourage patrons interested in audiobooks for adults and children to contact the [Kentucky Talking Book Library](http://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/talkingbook/Pages/default.aspx), part of the National Library Service. KTBL will provide individuals with audiobooks free of charge. For more information about this program go to <http://kdla.ky.gov/librarians/talkingbook/Pages/default.aspx>

**Remembering, Reminiscing, and Imagination** – Some patrons, especially in the early stages of Alzheimer's or Dementia, may remember events from their past and should be encouraged to reminisce and tell stories about childhood or meaningful life events. For patrons in the late stages of Alzheimer's or with more severe symptoms of dementia, remembering and reminiscing may be difficult and frustrating. Try encouraging these patrons to use their imagination and to create simple stories or poems about photographs, drawings, and pieces of music.

## Imagination

- [TimeSlips](http://www.timeslips.org/) Creative Storytelling – Using the free TimeSlips format storytelling is open to everyone – the pressure of remembering is replaced with the freedom to imagine.  
<http://www.timeslips.org/>
  - Watch a [video of a TimeSlip session](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yxxbw7Ylys&list=PL929E301193402629&index=1&feature=plpp_video) at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yxxbw7Ylys&list=PL929E301193402629&index=1&feature=plpp\\_video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yxxbw7Ylys&list=PL929E301193402629&index=1&feature=plpp_video)
  - To use the TimeSlips program online you will need to register for a free account. TimeSlips does charge for participating in their official training sessions, but you can create stories using their online pictures with the free account. Stories can be saved or published to the TimeSlips website. Click the “start a story” button to begin.
  - The basic idea behind TimeSlips is to show a patron an 8X10 photograph and ask a question or series of questions designed to get them using their imagination. By answering the simple questions each patron creates a unique story about the photo.
  - Examples of photographs and questions that would make good imagination programming – find free images to print at [Microsoft Images](http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/images/) online at <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/images/> or use images you already have in Microsoft Clipart or otherwise own:



- What is happening here?
- What are these things?
- Do they know each other? How?
- What smells/sounds/sights/feelings do you imagine?
- Where are they from? How did they get here? Where are they going?
- What do you think will happen next?
- Where does this take place? When?
- What do you want to name them?
- What does she dream about?
- Are other people around? Who? What are they doing?
- What do you want to name this story?

Appropriate questions are short and open-ended, encouraging the use of imagination.

**Reminiscing** and telling stories about the past

- Popular topics for reminiscing topics: Holidays, traditions, popular entertainment (radio, tv, movies), transportation, family, school days, the seasons, travel, religious services, work, milestones in their life, and important cultural events (moon landing, civil rights movement).
  - For tips instructions on engaging older people in reminiscing activities, see the [Benevolent Society](http://www.bensoc.org.au/uploads/documents/reminiscing-handbook-jan2006.pdf) of Australia's excellent handbook intended for caregivers. <http://www.bensoc.org.au/uploads/documents/reminiscing-handbook-jan2006.pdf>
  - A few general tips about group reminiscing:
    - Provide a comfortable, warm, well-lit room with a minimum of extraneous noise. Use this room each time the group meets.
    - Five or six participants is usually the ideal size for a reminiscing group. Include both men and women when possible.
    - Ask relevant questions at important points in his/her story.
    - Do not interrupt but wait for a natural pause.
    - Provide time for each person to express him or her self as they desire.
    - Phrase questions carefully so that if a person doesn't remember information, he or she will not lose face.
    - Respect sensitive or uncomfortable areas or topics. Never push a person to share something they don't want to.
    - Provide or ask participants to bring props to serve as memory catalysts.
    - Assist confused individuals (who may repeat things) to focus his or her thoughts by encouraging them to elaborate on a particular memory.
  - If possible include objects that stimulate sight, sound, taste, hearing or smell when you reminisce. Sense stimulation often triggers memories – try playing music, using scented candles or playing with classic toys to get patrons talking.
  - Conversation Starters to get your reminiscing started – remember to keep questions short and open-ended:
    - What is your favorite holiday? What made it special? Did your family have any traditions?
    - What was it like in when you were in school?
    - What was your favorite job? Your first job?
    - What were birthdays like in your family?
    - What is one thing you would like your grandchildren to know about you?
    - Who taught you how to drive?
    - Have you ever had anything humorous happen on a date?
    - Describe the house you grew up in.
    - Tell us about your best childhood friend.
    - What do you remember about your grandparents?
    - What states, countries, and continents have you visited?
    - What is your earliest childhood memory about snow?
    - If you could re-live a day of your life again, which would it be? Why?
    - What were your favorite foods as a child?
    - What did you do for fun when you were a teenager?

- Tell me about your hometown.
- How did [choose an event in history, like WWII, civil rights movement, computer age, etc.] influence you or your family?

## Other Activities

The [Alzheimer's Association list of 101 activities](http://www.alz.org/living_with_alzheimers_101_activities.asp)

[http://www.alz.org/living\\_with\\_alzheimers\\_101\\_activities.asp](http://www.alz.org/living_with_alzheimers_101_activities.asp)

- 1 Listen to music
- 2 Toss a ball
- 3 Color pictures
- 4 Make homemade lemonade
- 5 Count trading cards
- 6 Clip coupons
- 7 Sort poker chips
- 8 Read out loud chapters from favorite stories.
- 9 Rake leaves
- 10 String beads
- 11 Bake cookies
- 12 Take photos of the person and you and create a collage
- 13 Brush or comb one another's hair
- 14 Participate in the Alzheimer's Association Walk to End Alzheimer's.  
To learn more about Walk, please click [here](#).  
[http://act.alz.org/site/PageServer?pagename=walk\\_homepage](http://act.alz.org/site/PageServer?pagename=walk_homepage)
- 15 Plant seeds indoors or outdoors
- 16 Look at family photographs
- 17 Wipe off the kitchen table
- 18 Weed the flowerbed or tend to the garden
- 19 Fold laundry
- 20 Have a friend visit with a well-behaved pet
- 21 Cut pictures out of greeting cards or magazines
- 22 Play dominoes
- 23 Ask the person about his or her favorite childhood books or cartoon characters
- 24 Bake homemade bread
- 25 Sort objects by shape or color
- 26 Sing or listen to old songs
- 27 Invite the person to tell you more when he or she talks about a memory
- 28 Put silverware away
- 29 Make a holiday or thank you card
- 30 Play favorite songs and sing
- 31 Ask the person about his or her brothers or sisters
- 32 Make a cherry pie
- 33 Play with tops or jacks
- 34 Make a scrapbook
- 35 Take a walk around the yard

- 36 Write a poem together
- 37 Reminisce about the first day of school
- 38 String Cheerios® to hang outside for birds
- 39 Make a fresh fruit salad
- 40 Sweep the patio
- 41 Color paper shamrocks green
- 42 Fold towels
- 43 Have an afternoon tea party
- 44 Talk about great inventions
- 45 Look through the pages of a clothes catalog
- 46 Look at a map of the United States and identify states and capitals
- 47 Make a family tree poster
- 48 Color a picture of our flag
- 49 Eat a picnic lunch outside
- 50 Water house plants
- 51 Play horseshoes
- 52 Dance
- 53 Watch Sesame Street together
- 54 Make homemade ice cream
- 55 Make greeting cards
- 56 Reminisce about favorite sports activities the person enjoyed while growing up
- 57 Write a letter to a friend or family member
- 58 Dress in your favorite football or soccer team's color
- 59 Pop popcorn
- 60 Name the presidents
- 61 Give a manicure
- 62 Make paper butterflies
- 63 Plant a tree
- 64 Finish famous sayings
- 65 Feed the ducks
- 66 Mold play-dough sculptures
- 67 Look at pictures in a comic book
- 68 Put a puzzle together
- 69 Sand wood
- 70 Rub in hand lotion
- 71 Arrange fresh flowers
- 72 Remember famous people
- 73 Recite nursery rhymes
- 74 Make peanut butter sandwiches
- 75 Cut up used paper for scratch paper
- 76 Blow bubbles
- 77 Take care of a fish tank
- 78 Bake cupcakes and decorate them
- 79 Interview the person about his or her life using either a video camera or cassette recorder
- 80 Play Hangman
- 81 Finger paint



- 82 Cut out pictures from magazines
- 83 Put coins in a jar
- 84 Put bird seed out for the birds
- 85 Decorate a pumpkin
- 86 Reminisce about a favorite summer
- 87 Roll yarn into a ball
- 88 Trace and cut out autumn leaves
- 89 Cook a favorite family recipe together
- 90 Gather a yellow sponge, crayons, paper and tape and make a SpongeBob SquarePants
- 91 Wash silverware
- 92 Give him or her a hug
- 93 Ask the person to show you how to knit or sew (or another favorite hobby)
- 94 Make a picture frame out of popsicle sticks and glitter
- 95 Play a musical instrument
- 96 Keep a journal together
- 97 Ask the person to talk about his or her favorite sports hero
- 98 Sort playing cards
- 99 Ask the person about his or her favorite pet
- 100 Wash windows together
- 101 Ask the person about his or her first car

**[The Activity Directors Office](http://www.theactivitydirectorsoffice.com/Gina_ActivityIdeasThatWork_Alzheimers.html)** – A list of activities to do with people diagnosed with Alzheimer's and/or dementia at [http://www.theactivitydirectorsoffice.com/Gina\\_ActivityIdeasThatWork\\_Alzheimers.html](http://www.theactivitydirectorsoffice.com/Gina_ActivityIdeasThatWork_Alzheimers.html)

**Sorting:** Get items that can be sorted by the residents such as Buttons (different sizes and colors), poker chips, balls, bottle caps, forks, spoons, rocks, etc. Have residents sort items out, make sure to always have staff by the resident to watch that they don't eat items.

**Play dough/Clay:** Give resident some clay or play dough and have them make something, anything. This is good exercise for their hands.

**Book Making:** Have your residents go through different magazines and look for a specific item. Examples: birds, ladies, babies, cats, dogs, food, cars etc. then have residents cut the items out and make their own "books".

**What's in the Bag?** Get a bag and fill it with different items such as cotton balls, sandpaper, leaves, newspaper, felt, q-tips, golf ball, sock, clothespin, etc, then have residents take turns and feel what is in the bag, and tell you what the items are.

**Stringing:** Get Cheerios, fruit loops, popcorn, or honey combs cereal and some string and let your residents string up a chain to put outside for the birds. This activity is fun because they can eat some while they make their chains.

**Cooking Class:** Make a fruit salad: get different fruits and have residents cut up with plastic knives, add whipped cream or plain yogurt, Yummy!

**BBQ:** get a small/large George Forman Grill and buy some hot dogs and have a BBQ. The George Forman Grill is great to have for your facility because its small, cleans up easy, and the smell of the cooking item on the grill is wonderful for the residents. Other items to grill: Grilled Cheese Sandwiches, Chicken Breasts for Chicken Salad & Quesadillas.

**Other stuff to make:** Tuna Salad, Smoothies, Ice cream Sundaes, & Nachos.

**Pet Therapy:** I have found that if you can have animals at your facility, do it!!! They can be a lot of work but they residents really respond to dogs, cats, rabbits, birds, turtles and most any animals. And the fun part is that you can get your residents to help with their care, feeding, and walking the dogs.

**Ball Toss:** Get some residents and a ball and have some fun, place residents in a circle and roll ball towards residents, let them kick it or toss it.

**Life Skills:** Have residents fold clothes, sweep, dust, vacuum and set dining room tables. Alzheimer's residents love to help. I have found that if you say "I am so busy, can you help me fold these clothes Mrs. Johnson" they will love to do it.

**Exercise:** Take your residents outside for a walk; always take a caregiver or someone else with you and a cell phone if possible.

**Music Appreciation:** Music soothes the soul, put on some music any kind of music and just sit back with your residents and listen, some residents may sing along, some will dance, anything goes.

[Therapeutic Recreation Directory](http://www.recreationtherapy.com/tx/dementia.htm) is a great source to find physical and mental activity programs appropriate for persons with Alzheimer's or dementia. The activities are specifically designed for use in care facilities. <http://www.recreationtherapy.com/tx/dementia.htm>

## Web Resources

[Alzheimer's Association](http://www.alz.org/about_us_about_us.asp) - The Alzheimer's Association is a nonprofit that works on a global, national and local level to enhance care and support for all those affected by Alzheimer's and related dementias. [http://www.alz.org/about\\_us\\_about\\_us.asp](http://www.alz.org/about_us_about_us.asp)

Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services / [Department for Aging and Independent Living](#) – Find information about adult daycare centers and independent living alternatives. <http://chfs.ky.gov/dail/>

[Alzheimer's facts and figures](#) for each state – view an interactive map with information about Alzheimer's. Also has a short fact sheet for each state.

[http://www.alz.org/alzheimers\\_disease\\_facts\\_and\\_figures.asp#state](http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_facts_and_figures.asp#state)

The University of Kentucky [Sanders-Brown Center on Aging](#) – Information for community members and researchers. Also includes information about joining research studies and a section of useful links about Alzheimer's and other age-related conditions. <http://www.uky.edu/coa/>

[National Institutes of Health National Institute on Aging](#) – Find Alzheimer's Disease Centers (ADCs), clinical trial information, and NIH publications.

<http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/alzheimers-disease-research-centers>

[KET - The Forgetting](#) and [Alzheimer's in Kentucky](#) Documentary – This extraordinary website contains a selection of local resources, a section dedicated to caregivers, and information about coping with Alzheimer's for patients and families. <http://www.ket.org/forgetting/index.htm>

[Common Types of Dementia](#) – The Alzheimer's Association has a readable chart listing common types of dementia and their characteristics. [http://www.alz.org/alzheimers\\_disease\\_related\\_diseases.asp](http://www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_related_diseases.asp)

[10 warning signs](#) worksheet from the Alzheimer's Association – Early detection matters, and the Alzheimer's Association has created this 10 question worksheet to take with you to your doctor when you talk about Alzheimer's and/or dementia.

[http://www.alz.org/national/documents/checklist\\_10signs.pdf](http://www.alz.org/national/documents/checklist_10signs.pdf)

## Partnership Ideas

- Retirement communities, hospitals, hospice, nursing homes, other care facilities and adult daycares. Remember to include any individuals receiving care at home.
- The local Department for Health and Family Services.
- The closest chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.
- A local community college with a nursing or home health education program.
- Formal or informal local groups of caregivers and family members.