

Caregiver's Corner Column (July 2013)

Ideas for Summer Fun with Your Loved One with Dementia

By: Lianna Reatini, COTAL and Kimberly VanDam, COTAL
Easter Seals of Michigan

Summertime is often the time for family gatherings, outdoor activities and traveling. Engaging in activities gives us pleasure and adds meaning to our lives. The same is true for people living with dementia. When caring for a loved one with dementia, you are often left wondering what you can do to include that person.

For a person with dementia, participating in activities has proven to decrease agitation and sun downing, enhance a person's mood, improve overall quality of life and keep the person more physically and mentally active. The thing to keep in mind is that you do not necessarily need to come up with specific activities just for your loved one, you can usually include them in activities already going on simply by modifying it to the person's ability. This may be as easy as completing the first few steps for them, bringing the activity to a sitting level or using larger items that can be seen and manipulated easier. Remind yourself that the end result is not necessarily the importance of the activity but the fact that your loved one is participating. If the person is not able to actively participate they can still be involved in conversations about the activities by pointing out colors, talking about the smell of the food or how much fun the children are having. Even if the person cannot respond, he or she is likely to benefit from the communication.

Thinking of specific activities to include your loved one in can be difficult to come up with at times; here are some ideas to get you started.

Summer Holiday Gatherings

- Help make kabobs for a family BBQ or mix in ingredients to a salad
- Roll a large ball back and forth or fly a kite with grandchildren
- Listen to music by the pool
- Watch/play with sparklers if they are capable
- Watch a parade in person, from a distance or even on television (Don't forget the American flags for waving)
- Simple lawn games i.e. horseshoes, bocce ball or croquet

Fun in the sun:

- Picnic at the park
- Dip your feet in a wading pool
- Go for a short walk
- Hit a beach ball back and forth
- Listen to the radio in the shade
- Feed the ducks at a nearby pond.

Green Thumb:

- Plant flowers in pots
- Pick berries
- Rake the leaves or sweep the porch
- Water the flowers
- Watch the birds on the bird feeder

Remember, when participating in any type of activity with your loved one it is important to keep them as comfortable as possible. Pay attention to their mood, do they seem relaxed and happy or confused and agitated? Remember to always keep a familiar face nearby, avoid chaotic and hectic gatherings that may be over stimulating, keep your family member on schedule as much as possible and make sure they are getting enough to drink and eat. If possible, be able to provide a quiet space where your family member can take a break and rest or calm down if the noise is becoming too much for them.

Summer is a time for family and friends to enjoy each other and outside activities together. Being able to include your loved one in the family gathering can bring just as much joy to you and the rest of your family as it does to them. Having fun and enjoying their company is a good reminder that it does not always have to be work when you are with your loved one and it will leave you with memories years down the road. Remember safety and have a wonderful summer!

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.

Source: Scott, Paula Spencer. "Celebrating July 4th With a Loved One Who Has Dementia." *Caring.com*. N.p., 3 July 2012. Web. 15 May 2013