



Alzheimer's Awareness Family Night

HANDOUTS AND RESOURCES

SESSION #4:

Environment: Creating the Comforts of Home

Handout #1: Opening Exercise

Can you unscramble the words below?

A house is also a:

1. MEOH = _____
2. VANEH = _____
3. GWINDELL = _____
4. THATAIB = _____
5. GEERUF = _____
6. STEERLH = _____
7. TRAUNYACS = _____

Handout #2: No-Pressure Quiz

1. **Making a home emotionally comfortable for someone with Alzheimer's disease often requires paying attention to physical elements such as noise, lighting and clutter.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. **As people age, they need more light to complete almost any task, so you needn't worry about too much light from window glare.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. **It is important for all older people to get outdoors regularly. Which of the following is NOT a known benefit of being outdoors?**
 - a. Improving circadian rhythms and normal sleep patterns
 - b. Increasing appetites
 - c. Decreasing anxiety and improving one's sense of well-being
 - d. Reducing wrinkles
 - e. Better ability to manufacture Vitamin D in the body which leads to better calcium levels and stronger bones

4. **Which of the following are common hearing problems for people as they age?**
 - a. Being unable to distinguish background noises from the conversation they want to hear
 - b. Being unable to hear high-pitched sounds such as children's or women's voices
 - c. Hearing sounds as muffled so that they can't understand beginning and ending consonants.
 - d. All of the above
 - e. B and C only

5. **Older adults who do not exercise regularly are at increased risk for:**
 - a. Falls
 - b. Decreased muscle mass leading to decreased mobility
 - c. Poor bowel and bladder function
 - d. Foggy thinking
 - e. All of the above

- 6. Appropriate seating for older adults contributes to mobility because**
- a. If a chair is too difficult for a person to rise from independently, that person is effectively restrained and unable to move about.
 - b. If benches aren't placed at regular intervals on a walking path as resting places, older adults may be unwilling to walk the path all.
 - c. If a chair has castors, people who use it for support may be at risk for having it slide away and cause them to fall.
 - d. All of the above
 - e. A and C only
- 7. One of the most effective ways to assist people with dementia with wayfinding is to provide landmarks.**
- a. True
 - b. False
- 8. People with dementia generally seem to be most comfortable in rooms that are the size of rooms in an ordinary home.**
- a. True
 - b. False
- 9. Clutter for people with AD can mean many things. Which of the following is LEAST likely to be a confusing or frustrating environmental element for someone with AD?**
- a. A built-in book shelf full of books
 - b. A dinner plate loaded with items from a buffet
 - c. A dining room filled with people and wheel chairs and little space between tables
 - d. An elegant place setting with multiple forks, spoons, glasses and individual finger bowls
 - e. A gardening activity in which the following items are placed in front of each person: container of dirt, empty pot, gardening gloves, trowel, seedlings, small watering can and a picture of fully grown tomato plants
- 10. People with AD have many possible reasons for saying they want to go home. Which of the following is LEAST likely to be a helpful solution?**
- a. Offering something to eat or a place to rest
 - b. Telling the person "Your ARE home; this is where you live now."
 - c. Removing them from a noisy room where people are shouting or loud music is playing
 - d. Reducing background noises in the room
 - e. Re-arranging furniture so that there are clear pathways and it's easy to find a place to sit down

Handout #3: Important Points and Resources

A summary of the discussion

Creating a physically safe environment for the person with Alzheimer's disease is often a first step in creating an emotionally safe environment. In this session, we have used two books by Elizabeth C. "Betsy" Brawley (See Resources) to highlight key elements of a safe environment.

The "TOOs"

Much of Betsy's cautionary advice can be summarized by saying, "Watch out for the too's in the environment."

- TOO dark/bright
- TOO noisy
- TOO hard to maneuver
- TOO big
- TOO cluttered
- TOO boring
- TOO crowded
- TOO distracting
- TOO new/unfamiliar

Let there be light

Betsy has 6 guidelines for effective lighting of the environment:

1. Raise the overall level of illumination.
2. Provide consistent, even light levels.
3. Eliminate glare.
4. Provide access to natural daylight and get people outdoors regularly.
5. Provide gradual changes in light levels.
6. Provide focused task lighting.

Creating a quieter environment

Noise is simply unwanted sound, and our lives are filled with it in the form of often ceaseless background sounds and many noisy daily events. At the same time, hearing problems in older adults abound, and few people have appropriate aids. Being unable to understand what's going on around us contributes to lowered confidence and self-esteem as well as frustration.

It should be noted that a small, but significant number of people with Alzheimer's disease seem to have acute hearing and be hypersensitive to sounds. That can be equally aggravating and uncomfortable.

Among the simple ways to reduce noise are these:

- Carpet floors wherever possible.
- Use sheers or other draperies for windows.

- Hang quilts or other fabric “pictures” on walls.
- Upholster furniture or add cushions to help absorb sound.
- Hang colorful towels, terrycloth bathrobes, and fabric shower curtains with liners in bathrooms.
- Offer lightweight headphones to people so they don’t have to disturb others when they listen to programs at a volume not needed by everyone.
- Turn off constant background music or inappropriate TV programming which can cause agitation.

Mobilize everyone

In people with AD, there is damage to the part of the brain that affects proprioception, which means understanding where their bodies are in space. This loss is the reason it can be so difficult to get a person to sit down in a chair or get into a car or maneuver through a crowded room.

Seating

Betsy notes that most upholstered furniture is “too low, too soft and too deep” for many frail elderly people to get out of, which may cause them to forego sitting at all on a particular couch or to confine them unnecessarily if they do sit down. Appropriate seating should include:

- Variety, in height and depth and function
- Open space under the chair and arms that stick out further than the seat of the chair
- Curved lines – no sharp corners or edges, bull-nosing of all wooden surfaces
- No castors

Wayfinding

People with dementia often have difficulty finding their way to specific places, but they can frequently be helped by providing landmarks – unusual identifying features such as a grandfather clock or a hanging quilt.

Size and content of environment

Most people with AD seem to feel safer and more comfortable in smaller spaces.

A room may also be uninviting if it contains too many things or too many distractions. Striking a balance between sensory stimulation and sensory overload is always a challenge

How the physical environment affects the emotional environment

A person with AD who says, “I want to go home,” is essentially saying, “I am uncomfortable; remove me from this setting.” As that person’s verbal skills diminish with his condition, it’s important to recognize the symbolism behind the words. As we’ve noted, “home” has both an emotional and a physical meaning. On the physical level, it is a haven where we are most comfortable using the bathroom, sleeping, eating, and relaxing. A person with AD who says he wants to go home is often using a general statement to express one of those basic needs.

On the emotional level, home is where we feel safe, valued, and loved – where we belong. As someone once said, “A real home is more than just a roof over your head – it’s a foundation under your feet.” The ideal environment is one that feels like a safe refuge and a sanctuary of grace.

A resource list

Most of the ideas in this session come from two books written by Elizabeth (“Betsy”) C. Brawley:

- *Designing for Alzheimer’s Disease*, (© 1997)
- *Design Innovations for Aging and Alzheimer’s* (© 2005).

A third excellent and detailed resource that is useful for general aging issues and in both residential care and home settings is Mark Warner’s *The Complete Guide to Alzheimer’s Proofing Your Home* (Revised paperback edition, © 2000)

NOTES

NOTES
