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Family Caregivers: Activities and Entertainment Ideas

Sometimes with declining sensory perception and mobility, older adults frequently spend much of the day just watching television or lying in bed. This lack of stimulation can lead to a further decline in ability and motivation, causing a downward spiraling cycle.

Activities

The following list provides some ideas for activities to help keep the older family member involved in daily family activities. You can gear choices to the individual's abilities and interests. Gentle reminders and encouragement will help.

- **Coupon Cutting/Sorting** - Whether the coupons are used or not, this provides a feeling of helping with family savings and allows reminiscence of family choices, etc.
- **Yarn Rolling** - If there is a crafter in the family, this can provide a useful pastime and be helpful. Encourage interests in knitting, crocheting, etc.
- **Coin Sorting** - (Only if items are not in danger of being tasted/swallowed!) This could include sorting into piles, placing in rolls, or stacking specific amounts.
- **Laundry** - Folding laundry may be a busy activity or truly beneficial to the family. Smaller items (washcloths, towels, underclothes, socks) are easy for the weaker elderly to manage. Hand washing clothes items in a small basin may be satisfying.
- **Photo Sorting or Photo Album Visit** - Provides reminiscence. If able, the family member may arrange in photo albums all the family pictures that have been accumulating!
- **Pet Therapy** - Activity may vary from feeding and watering to walking the pet to planned times of physical contact.
- **Exercise and Activity** - Walks, exercise activities, and rocking chairs may be therapeutic. Many good videos or TV exercise programs are available and

provide a visual presence of another individual so they don't feel so alone.

- **Housework** - Washing dishes, dusting, setting the table, preparing or stirring salads or simple family dishes, may provide satisfaction in assisting to meet family needs.
- **Sensory Board** - Cover a lap tray with various types of material, textures, or sewing tools (zipper, button & buttonhole, velcro closure, etc).

When you have time to do things together, you can also try:

- **Large print crossword or word search puzzles** may be helpful with memory. Try puzzles, painting and crafts according to ability and attention span.
- **Music therapy** - Listening to the radio, tapes, CDs, or singing along. Piano or keyboard attempts (even if unable to play appropriate notes, playing may provide the musician with satisfaction). Small keyboards may come with volume control. Tapes of hymns may provide memory and recall for some.
- **Baking** - Providing a special family treat may give the elderly reminiscence and satisfaction.
- **Conversation & reminiscence** provide an opportunity for sharing family stories. These can be recorded or written out to become a Memory Book of family history. Sort through accumulation of old magazines, papers, books, clothes, etc., saved through the years, and discard or send to organizations such as DAV (Disabled American Veterans) or Goodwill, that accept donations. Special family heirlooms provide an opportunity for sharing as they are passed on to the next generation.
- **Physical contact** - hand/back massage, hugs - are therapeutic and soothing to the individual. The use of lotions may allow extra lubrication to the skin.

Also, for older adults with declining or limited vision, explore:

- Your Public Radio station for radio reading services.
- Audio Booktapes (available through the local library)

To encourage previous interests, try:

- Providing an activity board based on the individual's former interests:
Crafts - attach various types of fasteners, hooks to a board, provide appropriate tools (check children's section for safe tools with ease of use)
Workshop - Provide workbench and tools and small projects based on individual

ability.

- Providing an "office or work area" supplied with tools of the trade - draftsman's table, briefcase, toolbox - encourage planned time in the area on a regular basis.
- For travelers and "packers," provide a suitcase. This may avoid misplaced items or items being hidden.
- For gardeners: Try planters and window boxes for a garden or flower area.

Outdoor Activities

- Going outdoors getting some fresh air and sunshine helps too. A safe wandering area will provide exercise and may be a satisfying pastime.
- Provide glider to sit on while watching birdbath, feeder, or butterfly bush.
- Be sure there's enough shade during hot weather and enough drinking water to avoid dehydration.
- Assure appropriate clothing for the weather conditions.

While outside, provide suitable objects to be held and used for activities. Ideas:

- Gardening trowel and gloves
- Ball to throw for the dog
- Birdseed to fill the feeder
- Watering can
- Clothespins and line with small objects to be hung
- Bowl of beans to snap

These and other enjoyable activities will help to maintain independence in older adults.

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