

Tips to plan activities: art and writing

This help sheet gives tips for engaging in art, craft and writing activities with someone who has dementia. Everyone living with dementia is unique, so when reviewing these tips, consider the person's abilities, the impact dementia is having on them and their symptoms.

Everyone is creative. Your friend or family member may have enjoyed art or writing previously, or this could be a new activity for them. Artistic expression can be a part of living positively with dementia. Activities can help with communication and social engagement.

Art, craft and writing can also be creative activities for someone in a caring role.

Here are some tips on how to enjoy creative art and writing activities with the person you are supporting.

1. Prepare the space

Find a table at a comfortable height. Prepare the space with creative materials. This might include paper (A4 is a good size; coloured paper is fun) and art materials (pastels, paints, markers, pens, pencils, modelling clay or fabric). Leave the choice open as to what the person is interested in. They may choose to create something, or just enjoy interacting with the materials through touch.

Invite them to join you for the activity. If they are not interested, leave it and try asking them again later.

2. Provide inspiration

For inspiration, provide objects within easy reach such as shells, flowers, seeds or autumn leaves. Or you might bring along personal photos or picture books for inspiration.

To encourage creativity, hand your friend or relative an item and describe it for them, or prompt a memory they might have had with the object.

3. Help start the activity

If helpful, be ready to start the creative process, by choosing a colour, drawing the first line or picking up and describing the fabric or object. If the person has been an artist or has regularly enjoyed creative activities, a prompt may not be necessary.

4. A writing project

Some people with dementia enjoy writing to express their thoughts and record important things about their lives.

If the person needs help with the project, you could:

- use photos to inspire a story
- take dictation or record what they say and transcribe their story, then read it back to them
- ask if they want to continue with the project with or without your help.

5. Support all creative work

Be supportive of all artistic efforts. If you don't understand the artwork, admire the colours or patterns. Don't worry about correcting words that are spelled wrong. Try to imagine what the word might be. If you recall memories differently, don't correct them. Treat stories as works of the imagination. Read texts out loud.

6. Presenting the work

Respect whatever is produced as an artistic expression and ask your friend to sign it. You could then:

- mount it on coloured paper
- photocopy it and turn it into a card to send to friends and family
- frame it.

Helping carers be creative

If you are a carer, recognise the need to support your emotional wellbeing, to help you live well too.

Nurture your own creative needs. If you have no opportunity to be creative yourself, it can be hard to encourage someone else to try these sorts of activities.

Some ideas to get you started:

- Set up a space for yourself with materials laid out (pen, notebook, paints, paper).
- Leave your work out so you can catch creative moments.
- Try making art or writing a daily activity to nurture yourself.
- Give yourself small treats of beautiful materials: a pen that writes smoothly, or paints or pastels in new colours.
- Respect your own artworks and instead of tearing up old ‘failed’ drawings or paintings, try making a collage with them. With written work, add phrases to later pieces of writing.

Additional reading and resources

- **Dementia Australia library service**

Visit: dementia.org.au/library

- **Family and friends matter**

Visit: dementia.org.au/resources/family-and-friends-matter

- **Dementia-friendly communities**

Visit: dementiafriendly.org.au

Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

For language assistance: 131 450

Visit our website: dementia.org.au