

What to Do When You Haven't a Clue: Five Simple Ideas to Engage Your Loved One

As a loved one ages, it can be difficult to find ways to make meaningful moments with them. This especially can be true when your loved one faces a dementia diagnosis or has undergone a physical decline. When family members become family caregivers, interactions with their loved one often focuses on the care tasks instead of engaging with them. Time constraints make it difficult for a family caregiver to do more than the care tasks. Being at a loss of how to interact now that your loved one is declining also plays a role. However, taking a few moments to engage with them beyond the care tasks not only strengthens your relationship, it also preserves your loved one's dignity. If you are at a loss as what to do when you have time with your loved one, here are five easy ideas to help you create meaningful moments beyond the basic care tasks.



Revisit Favorite Hobbies

One way to have meaningful moments with your loved one is to revisit their hobbies. Whether it's a hobby they enjoyed as a young or middle-aged adult, or one that they picked up after retirement, hobbies offer an escape and promote creativity. Explore favorite hobbies your loved one enjoyed prior to their mental or physical decline. There are many ways to adapt hobbies for those who have physical limitations. Try adaptive equipment, such as thicker paint brush handles for easier grip or larger print for reading or for working word puzzles. For a loved one who is living with memory loss, simplify hobbies by breaking down a larger task into simple, easy to accomplish steps. Also consider taking your loved one to a place that relates to their favorite hobbies, such as an art gallery, wood shop, craft store, or bakery.

Prepare Conversation Starters

It might be silly to think that you need to come up with a topic of conversation to have with your loved one. However, often when a loved one suffers from a physical or mental decline, conversation can quickly lag or become repetitive, leading to frustration. Before you visit your loved one, take a few moments to prepare a few conversation starters so that you have a direction to take your conversation. Reminiscence works well for any aging loved one, but especially with someone living with memory loss. Remember that someone with dementia may recall more easily events from their childhood or young adulthood. Pour yourself and your loved one a cup of tea or coffee and spend a few moments engaging in conversation. You may learn more about them than you already knew and uncover another side of your loved one through conversation.

Introduce Sensory Kits

Bringing physical props or objects that your loved one can manipulate is another way in which to create meaningful moments with them. Sensory kits are easy to throw together and do not necessarily require a trip to the store. Theme the kits around the seasons, holidays, activities, places, or similar objects. For example, a cooking or baking sensory kit would include items such as an apron, oven mitt, whisk, spatula, measuring spoons, a few recipes, and spices. Then, during your visit, place the kit in front of your loved one and explore each item together. Put the apron on your loved one and let them wear the oven mitt. Ask them to identify the spices based on the smell or taste. Ask them questions about each item, such as how they would use the item or what they can make with the item. Try to engage all five senses—sight, touch, taste, smell, and sound—as you explore the sensory kit together. For someone living with memory loss, sensory kits are a great way to orient them to the season or time of year.

Take It Outside

When you don't know what to do with your loved one, head outdoors. Changing up your loved one's environment by simply taking them outdoors can help you create a new routine with them. Find a comfortable spot outdoors, either on the front porch or patio, and visit with them in a different setting. Encourage birds to entertain you and your loved one with bird feeders, bird houses, and/or bird baths. If your loved one is more able, take them on a short walk around the neighborhood. For someone with dementia, going for a walk in the early afternoon can help prevent agitation and other behaviors related to sundowning. There's something about being outside that can change the mood and create meaningful moments.

Involve Your Loved One in Tasks

Finally, if you're limited on time and need to accomplish care tasks during your visit, encourage your loved one to complete the tasks with you. Involving them with simple tasks can help preserve their dignity. Ask them to help you fold laundry or make a grocery list. Depending on their ability, involve them in financial matters such as paying the bills or balancing the checkbook. Try doing things their way instead of your way. Instead of scheduling an appointment and then telling them when it is, ask them to choose between two dates that work for you, and make the appointment on the day that they select. Try to avoid completely taking over their life; instead, find ways to involve them in the decision and care-taking process.

[Visiting Angels Fort Worth](#) understands the burden of caring for an aging loved one. If you are limited on time, allow us to come alongside you to help give you back more quality time with your loved one. Our caring Angels are compassionate and receive specialized training, giving you the peace of mind that you're leaving your loved one in good hands. We offer a variety of services that allow your loved one to remain safely and independently at home, while you attend to the other responsibilities in your life. Then, when you visit with your aging loved one, you can focus on the relationship instead of the care tasks. [Give us a call](#) today to set up a free consultation so that we can learn more about your situation and tailor a care plan based on the needs of your loved one.

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