

## Knowing a Person and their Preferences!

### **Personal Preferences Matter**

We each have personal preferences (our likes and dislikes); some matter more to us than others. Our personal preferences tell others a lot about who we are and have been. This is true for individuals living with dementia; but they can have a harder time having their preferences and needs understood and satisfied. Preferences can change over time, so it is important to revisit a person's preferences from time to time as their condition and abilities change. Family members can be a good source of this information, but so are residents.

### **Preferred Name**

Fundamental to connecting with an individual is referring to them and speaking to them using their preferred name. All too often we take short cuts and resort to referring to an individual on the basis of a condition or a need or a task (feeder or bather) or we assume a level of familiarity (honey or sweetie) that we have not earned and is not appropriate. Ask the individual what they would like you to call them. If they are unable to respond, a family member can advise. But, it never hurts to start by calling an individual by their formal name (Mrs.... or Mr.....)

### **Learning Likes and Dislikes**

To learn more about an individual's personal preferences, offer simple choices between limited and familiar options. Residents with dementia (depending on where they are in the disease process) may want to SEE, HEAR, TOUCH, SMELL and even TASTE their options, not just be told their options. For example, when asking which of two outfits they would prefer to wear on a given day, slowly hold up and SHOW each option. Be sure that the options are within the individual's field of vision. They may want to touch the fabric. Then, slowly show the options again and ask which one they would like to wear; give them a moment to consider and watch and listen for cues of their preference. Taking time and using this same process to offer simple choices using familiar objects, foods, tastes, fabrics/textures, photos/pictures, and stories will help you connect with the individual, support their abilities, help meet their needs, and alert you to changes in their abilities and conditions overtime.

### Key personal preferences include:

- What is calming, what are hot buttons that trigger distress?
- Is the individual an Introvert or Extrovert
- What is their preferred Handedness – right or left? Approach a person from their preferred side and support their preferred hand. (Note: this may force you to get better at using your non-preferred hand.)
- Touch, Textures, Environment, Noise, Space
- Favorite family relationships – investigate feelings about various family members now and in the past.
- Favorite topics, tastes, foods, drinks, places, restaurants, pets (dog or cat person), colors, season, do they prefer the beach or the mountains? Have they been outside the city in which they were born?
- Favorite job or parts of job, inside and outside the home
- Favorite leisure activities and beliefs about fun, games and free time, art, TV, Movies,
- Previous Daily Routines and Schedules
- Music – share music that was central to them when they were teens, young adults,
- Worship – Spiritual practices, beliefs, values

Recognizing and honoring personal preferences enhance your connections with individuals and their families and also enhances their levels of satisfaction.

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