



Tip #9

The Power of Meaningful Activities

Is your life meaningful? Does it have purpose?

We all need to have a purpose: to be needed, to make a difference, to be a part of something. It is no different for those who live in long-term care. After a life of helping others, these individuals are the ones being helped. For many, this change is not positive. How can you help someone who now resides in a long-term care community catch a glimpse of the meaning in their life today?

Helping residents find meaning and purpose in their daily life is not just the Activity Director's job!

Meaningful activity must be available continually--beyond isolated group programs. It is every caregiver's responsibility – and joy – to help people find purpose in daily activities with a combination of planned and spontaneous events.

What makes an activity meaningful?

Each resident will define meaning, according to what they value. Some might cherish relationships, so a good conversation or a visitor might be what they need. Some value physical activity, so a spontaneous dance to the radio provides a meaningful moment. Many still want to be of service, and need a way to help in the home or community. Offer opportunities such as:

- Chores (delivering mail, setting placemats, getting the paper)
- Reading to others
- Phone calls to shut ins
- Clipping coupons for visitors
- Creating cards (for prisoners, patients)
- Pen pals with students
- Sending items to the military
- Selling a product they made
- Stuffing envelopes for nonprofits
- Teaching other residents
- Sharing hobbies (knitting, books, stamps)
- Choral and drama groups

Action Steps:

1. **Please post this flyer for all caregivers to read!**
2. Meet with each resident and ask what gave their life meaning in the past – did they have a favorite “good cause,” enjoy a particular job, or pastime? Try to help them maintain or revive that focus now.
3. Offer a list of service activities to stimulate thoughts and help each individual choose something that has meaning for them. Encourage caregivers to involve interested residents in their “causes.”
4. Consider assembling a group of residents and caregivers or the Residents Council to create and undertake a home-wide project to help the outside community.
5. Note activity preferences on each resident's initial assessment as well as their regular care planning sessions. Follow up regularly to determine if the resident's current interests are being accommodated.

Additional Resources:

- For a video of a community of residents embracing service, see Helping Hands of Mission View Health Center which sells their handmade soap at farmers markets and uses the proceeds to serve meals to the homeless. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nE1A5SLqHro>.
- For a thorough overview and specific examples of meaningful activities, see *The Long-Term Care Improvement Guide* by Planetree and Picker Institute, 2010, pp. 216 – 236, 252 – 260 at http://www.elderguru.com/downloads/LTC_improvement_guide.pdf.
- *Vibrant Living: Inspirations to Energize Daily Life* by Carmen Bowman and LaVrene Norton is a how-to guide, scrapbook and storybook of inspirational stories of energizing daily life in a long term care community. For purchase at <http://actionpact.com/index.php/product/vibrant-living>.
- *Adapting Preferred Activities to Accommodate Resident's Changing Abilities* by Advancing Excellence at <https://www.nhqualitycampaign.org/files/AdaptingPreferredActivitiesToResident.pdf>.



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