



Person-Centered Care

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 bigger than ourselves. It is no different for those who live in long-term care. After a life of helping others, these individuals are now 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 his or her 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 both planned and spontaneous events.

What makes an activity meaningful?

Each resident will define meaning, according to what he or she values. 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. To meet these needs, offer opportunities such as:

- Chores (delivering mail, setting placemats)
- 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 a skill
- Sharing hobbies (knitting, books, stamps)
- Choral and drama groups

Action Items

- Meet with each resident and ask what gave his/her life meaning in the past. Did he/she have a favorite "cause" or enjoy a particular job or pastime? Try to help him/her maintain or revive that focus now.
- Offer a list of service activities to stimulate thoughts and help each individual choose something that has meaning for him/her. Encourage caregivers to involve interested residents in their "causes."
- 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.
- Note activity preferences on each resident's initial assessment and his/her regular care planning sessions. Follow up regularly to determine if the resident's current interests are being accommodated.

Additional Resources

- Helping Hands of Mission View Health Center, a video about a community of residents embracing service by selling their handmade soap at farmers' markets and using the proceeds to serve meals to the homeless: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nE1A5SLqHro>
- The Long-Term Care Improvement Guide by the Picker Institute and Planetree: http://www.elderguru.com/downloads/LTC_improvement_guide.pdf (See pages 216-236, 252-260 for a thorough overview and specific examples of meaningful activities.)
- *Vibrant Living: Inspirations to Energize Daily Life* by Carmen Bowman and LaVrene Norton, a how-to guide, scrapbook and storybook of inspirational stories about energizing daily life in a long-term care community, sold by Action Pact: <http://actionpact.com/index.php/product/vibrant-living>
- *Adapting Preferred Activities to Accommodate Resident's Changing Abilities* by National Nursing Home Quality Improvement Campaign: <https://www.nhqualitycampaign.org/files/AdaptingPreferredActivitiesToResident.pdf>

