

How The Sparkle Reminiscence Newspapers Work With Different Levels Of Dementia.

Dementias can be broken down into Mild, Moderate and Severe stages. Individuals go through the stages at different rates and there is often some overlapping of the stages.

On the following page you will find a brief and highly generalised description of the three main stages of dementia, together with notes covering how The Sparkles can be effectively used to achieve therapeutic benefits.

Mild Dementia - This stage may be characterised by:

- Recent memory loss begins to affect normal function
- Confusion
- Loss of spontaneity, spark, or zest for life
- depression may be present
- Loss of initiative; can't start anything
- Mood/ personality changes; anxiousness about symptoms, keeps to oneself
- Poor judgement; bad decision making
- Takes longer with routine chores
- Trouble handling money/ paying bills

The Sparkles provide an easy-to-use vehicle for all care home staff and visiting relatives to engage residents' areas of functioning memory [episodic]. They give subjects for conversation and engagement.

The Quiz can stimulate semantic memory and the prompts enable people with dementia the satisfaction of 'getting it right.'

At the mild and moderate stages though, The Sparkles greatest benefits are in the way they help the person cope with the anxiety experienced as their memory is seen to be failing.

The Sparkles help to achieve reduced levels of anxiety in the following ways:

Soothing - Familiarity, Simplicity, Safety and Security.

As a newspaper The Sparkles convey 'normality' (the articles are about familiar aspects of life), 'simplicity' (reading a newspaper is something everyone has done), 'safety' (reading a paper is non-threatening, comfortable) and 'security' (many of us have used newspapers in the past to distract us from personal discomforts and challenges).

Building meaningful relationships and a sense of community.

The Sparkles get people talking with one another. They facilitate resident to resident connections as the articles are written about topics that were shared experiences for all people living in the 1940s to 60s.

Activity, Care, Domestic, Catering and Admin staff often enjoy The Sparkles as much as the residents. As they read the papers they develop a common knowledge and have ready-made topics for generating conversations with the residents.

Visiting relatives and friends also enjoy The Sparkles and have fresh topics of conversation to supplement their stock talking points.

As the levels of interaction and conversation grow, so do the feelings of connectedness and belonging. An enhanced sense of community develops with benefits to everyone living, working or connected with the home. Trust levels increase as the residents share intimate memories of their earlier lives.

Enabling staff to really understand the person.

We all know that Person Centred Care is fundamental to a resident's Quality of Life. The Sparkles are an interactive tool that can be used by the staff to deepen their knowledge and understanding of their residents.

Articles in The Sparkles are specifically written to trigger memories and reminiscence. Because of the 'soothing' aspects referred to above, readers find themselves relaxed and at ease.

As the articles are written in a chatty, conversational style they engender the same relaxed chit-chat, and this is where a large amount of intimate knowledge of a person's life history can be accessed.

Feeling safe and secure, and comforted by memories of times past, residents will often reveal information which is deeply personal and which may never be accessed in any other way.

This information can help when it is then recorded in the person's personal care plan and used to inform staff as to what are important aspects of this individual's life experience and possible future needs.

Where the resident condition degenerates to advanced stages of dementia these details can be critical as a way of 'reaching' the person when all other means fail ('Validation' approach).

Moderate Dementia - This stage may be characterised by:

- Increasing memory loss and confusion, shorter attention span
- Problems recognizing close friends/ family
- Repetitive statements/ movements
- Restlessness, especially in late afternoon or night - (“sundowning”)
- Occasional muscle twitches or jerking
- Perceptual-motor problems
- Problems organizing thoughts or thinking logically
- Can’t find right words; makes up stories to fill in the blanks
- Problems with reading, writing, and numbers
- May be suspicious, irritable, fidgety, tearful or silly
- Loss of impulse control; won’t bathe, trouble dressing
- Wears 2-3 layers of clothing

The Sparkles greatest benefits are in the way they help the person cope with the anxiety experienced as their memory is seen to be failing.

See above sections on:

- Soothing - Familiarity, Simplicity, Safety and Security.
- Building meaningful relationships and a sense of community.
- Enabling staff to really understand the person.

The Sparkles also act as a unifying tool for small group reminiscence, which gives residents with moderate dementia the opportunity to socialise on an equal footing. Using the newspaper generates therapeutic activities that are ‘normal’ and non-threatening, qualities that are increasingly important as the dementia unfolds. Songs elevate mood and provide ‘achievable’ outcomes for all as music is really a fail safe in dementia care.

Severe Dementia - This stage may be characterised by;

- Doesn’t recognize family or self
- Loses weight even with proper diet
- Little capacity for self-care
- Can’t communicate verbally
- May put everything in mouth or touch everything
- Can’t control bowel or bladder
- May have difficulty with seizures, swallowing, skin breakdown, infections

The Sparkles are a useful ‘one on one’ tool for both staff and families, helping them provide auditory stimulation by reading the Sparkle aloud to the resident. Singing the songs provides the right hemisphere of the brain (functioning in most dementia’s) to route thoughts through melody/rhyming channels.

The photos in the newspaper will often generate memories. As with all levels of dementia, colour and brightness are particularly important as grey scale appears blurry. Field studies are now underway looking at the effectiveness of larger photos with just a short caption as research shows that pictorial recognition remains more intact when compared to verbal comprehension.