

Promoting healthy living: 30 creative ideas

Creative activities are an important part of the regular programme with people in residential care. Although staff may often be stretched to the limits, especially when working with people with multiple or profound disabilities, you will find that many techniques can be incorporated into a daily routine. For example, singing along together while dressing usually makes the task much easier, and can take less time rather than more.

Creative activities are important because they help people to remain more alert, whatever their age, and will slow down their deterioration and loss of memory (Katz, 1999). Creative activities can be individual, thus affirming a person's identity, as well as being communal, which develops communication and social relationships.

Everyone has the potential for being creative – staff as well as residents. Everyone has played as a child and has followed some creative hobby or interest. Our own experience is the core of the activities we can share with others and although further training is useful, it is not essential to follow most of the following ideas.

The important thing is to follow an idea that you feel comfortable with, rather than something that makes you feel silly. However, I discovered that some of my own reluctance to join in simple pencil and paper games stemmed from the heavy dose of sarcasm I experienced as a child with anything I put on paper!

The following activities are divided into four main sections:

- Movement and relaxation
- Painting and modelling
- Games and guessing
- Social theatre and drama.

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Dr Sue Emmy Jennings gives useful examples of activities that can be undertaken with older adults, covering movement, painting and modelling, games and drama.

All activities can be adapted to all age groups and abilities and require very little equipment or materials. They follow a developmental progression of bodywork, to projective activities, to role development. This is the 'embodiment–projection–role' (EPR) developmental model (Jennings, 2005) that can be applied with all creative activities.

Basically, EPR follows human development from pre-birth to 7 years and charts the development stages of dramatic play: These start as physical activities, or embodiment (0–14 months), continue as projective activities (14 months–3 years) and then change into role and dramatic play (4–7 years). Therefore, with adults it is helpful to at least loosely follow these stages since our brains have already become programmed into the sequence. Our brains become wired not only through our genetic inheritance, but also through our experiences in the first few years of life (LeDoux, 2002).

Activities

Movement and relaxation

These exercises can be done sitting or standing and many can be adapted for bed use.

1. Hand massage with baby lotion or a light hand cream using a 'washing' movement, either with a partner or for oneself.
2. Clapping the rhythms with hands or hands on lap (see end for music suggestions).
3. Shoulders moving alternately forward/back (chair jive) to music.

4. Marching on the spot with arms swinging.
5. Arms swaying from side to side to gentle music.
6. Give yourself a hug (stretches important muscles too) (*Figure 1*).
7. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth to a count of four. Then breathe in for four, pause for four and out for four. Check that people do not raise their shoulders.
8. Sing a song together, taking into consideration different songs for different generations. My group of elderly stroke people enjoys oldies like *Tivas on a Monday Morning* and equally, more recent songs such as *(I've Got a Brand New) Combine Harvester*, but they do not like anything modern! Similarly, find out the musical tastes of mixed ethnic groups and include everyone's preferences.

Painting and modelling

Some of the ideas can be developed with a group with a theme, while others can be free choice. Group members will also have their own ideas. There are many ideas in *Creative Art in Groupwork* (Campbell, 1993).

9. Many people need very thick paint to manage without drips, so mix ordinary powder/poster paint with plain flour.
10. Stencils help people to create a picture if they do not have confidence.
11. Collages can be created through 'magic foam', which is pre-cut and has a sticky back. It can be used for making greeting cards.
12. Collages can also be made from a combination of magazine pictures and paint.
13. Take each person's portrait photograph and let him or her paint his/her own frame round it.
14. 'New clay' can be modelled and then left to air-dry rather than put in a kiln. It can be painted when dry.
15. Play dough is simple to make and provides good hand exercise as well as

creative media for modelling. Use 1 kg plain flour, water, 4 tbsps cooking oil and a large handful of salt and mix to a non-sticky 'elastic' consistency. It can be baked and painted.

16. Creating life through growing something is very important. People start to observe and notice as signs of life start to appear. The simplest activity is growing carrot tops in a saucer of water or an avocado stone in a water jar.
17. Sprinkle some birdseed on a shallow tray of earth and see what plants will grow. Sunflower seeds put in a larger pot or trough will provide months of enjoyment.

Games and guessing

Games are important for collaboration and competition and most places will have standard card and board games. Guessing helps to keep people alert and the brain functioning. It is important that everyone understands the ground rules and also that games can be adapted for non-verbal people. There are some excellent ideas in the *Memory Joggers* series by Speechmark (Dynes and Dynes, 1996).

18. Victorian party games created all sorts of fun, such as passing an orange under the chin to your partner. We can use this principal by passing a squeeze round the circle as the group holds hands (*Figure 2*). Try to pass the squeeze 'invisibly'.
19. Pass round an orange, a lemon and a grapefruit and let everyone feel the texture and smell the skin and find words to describe the differences.
20. Quiz games from TV and radio can be adapted. You can mime titles of books, plays and films, for example.
21. Place some varied objects on a tray and let people see them perhaps for 3 mins, then cover them up and see how many they can remember. Start with a relatively small number and slowly increase it.
22. Going round the circle, say 'I went shopping and in my basket I bought...'. Everyone adds another item and tries to repeat all the previous ones. Vary it with all items starting with the same letter or all being food or clothes.
23. Pass a wooden spoon round the circle and everyone uses it as something other than a spoon.
24. Write down different activities on pieces of paper and mix them up in a hat or a



Figure 1. 'Give yourself a hug'.

bowl. Each person draws one out and mimes the activity and the others guess what it is.

Social theatre and drama

Dramatic activities are very important because they enable people to 'have a voice' about their own beliefs and they build up confidence through simple group performances. Some of the games in the

Figure 2. 'Passing round a squeeze'.



previous section can be used as a basis to start drama work (Hickson, 1995).

25. Create a debate about a topic that is being discussed on the news; have a chair and several speakers and the rest of the group can be the audience and ask questions.
26. Encourage people to tell stories from their own past and perhaps think of turning one into a play.
27. Create a history time where people all recall their own experiences, say of living through food rationing or the first mini skirts, or hearing that John Lennon had been killed.
28. Develop over several weeks a documentary about life in the residential home, where people can interview others and then present it to the staff.
29. Encourage a poetry and story group where people can feel they can try and write. Use newspaper headlines for lines of a poem, or a simple topic such as a seasonal greeting.
30. When you have your parties and celebrations, encourage people to contribute their own songs and sketches. Let them be entertainers as well as being entertained by others.

Closure

The 30 exercises that I have described above are within most people's, including staff's, capabilities. They are deliberately as varied

as possible to give people some choices. Obviously, they need to be adapted to special situations, especially when people are less mobile or have no speech.

There is a tendency to think that all drama work must be verbal, whereas it can be in mime and movement too. The person who is non-verbal can also contribute in other ways, like taking photos of the project.

Although many of the ideas are for fun and entertainment, it is important to remember that many people will express their deepest feelings through creative media (Weisberg and Wilder, 2001). It is important not to laugh or patronize poems or paintings. Go on – be creative and you will surprise yourself! **NRC**

Campbell J (1993) *Creative Art in Groupwork*. Speechmark, Bicester

Hickson A (1995) *Creative Action Methods in Groupwork*. Speechmark, Bicester

Katz L (1999) *Keep your Brain Alive*. Workman Publishing, New York

Jennings S (2005) *Creative Storytelling with Adults at Risk*. Speechmark, Bicester

LeDoux J (2002) *Synaptic Self: How Our Brains Become Who We Are*. Penguin, London

Dynes B, Dynes R (2006) *Memory Joggers 1940–1989*. Speechmark, Bicester

Weisberg N and R Wilder (2001) *Expressive Arts with Elders*. Jessica Kingsley, London

Useful information

SUGGESTIONS FOR MUSIC FOR MOVEMENT AND SING-ALONG

Gentle:

- *Strolling* – Flanagan & Allen
- *Underneath the Arches* – Flanagan & Allen
- *Roamin' in the Gloamin'* – Perry Como
- *If You Were the Only Girl in the World* – (various artists)
- *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* – (Paul Robeson)
- Soft 'nature' music
- Ballads from different countries (Irish, Balkan, East European)
- Spiritual and gospel songs.

More lively:

- *Lily the Pink* – (various artists)
- *Scotland the Brave* – (various artists)
- *Puppet on a String* – Sandy Shaw
- Lively drum beats from Korea, Japan, India, Africa
- Freedom songs, calypsos

KEY POINTS

- **Bodywork promotes physical and mental health.**
- **Games of all kinds keep us alert.**
- **Drama develops social contact.**
- **Social theatre gives us a voice.**
- **Creative activity encourages independence.**

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