

HEARTS & HORSES

Therapeutic Riding Center



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Riding in the Moment Programing for Alzheimer's and Dementia Tips for Instructors and Volunteers

- **Avoid open-ended questions such as "How was your week?"** This type of question could possibly lead to confusion and frustration as the participant may not be able to recall what happened. Instead, use statements based on fact. For example, rather than ask Mary if she wants to ride, you could say, "Mary, you look ready to ride today, and your horse is waiting for you."
- **Focus on the quality of the experience.** Use positive words and a plethora of compliments.
- **Make it interactive and fun.** For example, singing tends to be an engaging group activity enjoyed by many. Set up stations with varying interactive games and activities.
- **If the participant becomes agitated, see this as a message to explore why they are agitated.** Do not judge the behavior. Often, agitating behavior is a sign something is physically wrong. Validate their concerns, reassure and redirect their energy and focus, if possible.
- **Deliver polite, but clear directives with a great deal of patience.** For example, the mounting and dismounting processes with these participants can be extremely technical and challenging. Giving directives as opposed to asking questions may help the participants feel more confident and secure. Consider using phrases such as "It's really important that you..." and "I need you to..."
- **Train volunteers to understand and respond appropriately to the specific needs of this population.** The volunteer team for each participant can help create lasting, positive experiences and meaningful social bonds by engaging each participant where they are in the moment.
- **Be aware of the cognitive functionality of each participant.** Be sure to use the appropriate number of steps while giving directives so the participant does not become overwhelmed.
- **Actively listen.** Acknowledge what the participant says, whether comprehensible or not. Using nods and saying "Okay" allows the participant to feel heard and respected.
- **Turn any negative talk into something positive, and stay in the present moment.** Deliver supportive phrases to help build confidence; for instance, "We have this amazing team here just for you, to make sure you are safe."
- **Make eye contact.** Sometimes you can see what a person is feeling even if they can't use their words. Be sure to approach participants from the front where they can see you coming.
- **Use a firm touch.** Many participants love the physical contact and feeling of love that comes with a hug. For many, it helps them feel safe, but be sure to read the participant's body language and respect their boundaries if he or she does not welcome your touch.
- **Consider the time of day when the class is scheduled.** Later in the morning or early afternoon have proven to be the best times for this population when their energy levels are at a peak.
- **Have a variety of mounting and dismounting techniques.** Some participants use the mechanical lift at Hearts & Horses to mount the horse. Others may use an extra step on the mounting ramp to mount independently. Having platforms available at various heights can give that extra needed boost and avoiding discomfort.

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Dementia Resources

- Alzheimer's Association <http://www.alz.org/>
 - Provides educational information on dementia and Alzheimer's
 - 24/7 caregiver helpline
 - Local resources
 - Library/publication resources
 - Events and News
- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alzheimers>
 - The website provides resources on Alzheimer's, causes, symptoms and diagnosis, treatment, caregiving, related dementias, resources for professionals, and research and clinical trials
- <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/alzheimersdisease.html>
 - This website provides symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, management and prevention information on Alzheimer's.

Books

The 36-Hour Day: A Family Guide to Caring for People Who Have Alzheimer's Disease, Other Dementias, and Memory Loss, 6th edition, by Nancy L. Mace and Peter V. Rabins

Surviving Alzheimer's: Practical tips and soul-saving wisdom for caregivers, by Paula Spencer Scott

Thoughtful Dementia Care: Understanding the Dementia Experience, by Jennifer Ghent-Fuller
Activities to do with Your Parent who has Alzheimer's Dementia, by Judith A. Levy EdM OTR

The Dementia Handbook: How to Provide Dementia Care at Home, by Judy Cornish

When Reasoning No Longer Works: A Practical Guide for Caregivers Dealing with Dementia & Alzheimer's Care, by Angel Smits

Contented Dementia, By Oliver James

More resources can be found at <https://dailycaring.com/must-read-alzheimers-books-for-caregivers/>

Research

Fields, B., Bruemmer, J., Gloeckner, G., & Wood, W. (2018). Influence of an equine-assisted activities program on dementia-specific quality of life. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias*, 33(5), 309-317. doi:10.1177/1533317518772052

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