



E-BOOK

# 10 FUN AND SIMPLE ACTIVITIES TO ENGAGE PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA



Sage Eldercare Solutions<sup>SM</sup>  
*Wise Decisions, Extraordinary Care, Joyful Moments*





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# INTRODUCTION

For over 20 years, Sage Eldercare's professional care managers, care providers, and therapeutic activity specialists have been working with older adults and their families to provide quality care and promote quality of life. Our client families have often shared with us how difficult it is to start a meaningful conversation and connect with an aging loved one who may not remember one visit from the next. Professional care providers have also told us that despite spending many hours with a client daily, they often struggle to engage that person meaningfully.

This e-book outlines 10 activities to help older adults reignite purpose, joy, and meaning. The activities are fun and easy, so don't hesitate to dive in and see what works best for your client or loved one. Whether you are a professional caregiver or a family member, this resourceful guide will help reignite interests and bring joy!

# ENGAGING OLDER ADULTS THROUGH THE SEVEN DOMAINS OF WELLNESS

Too often as we age our world seems to shrink. Mobility challenges, health issues, or cognitive decline can limit our possibilities.

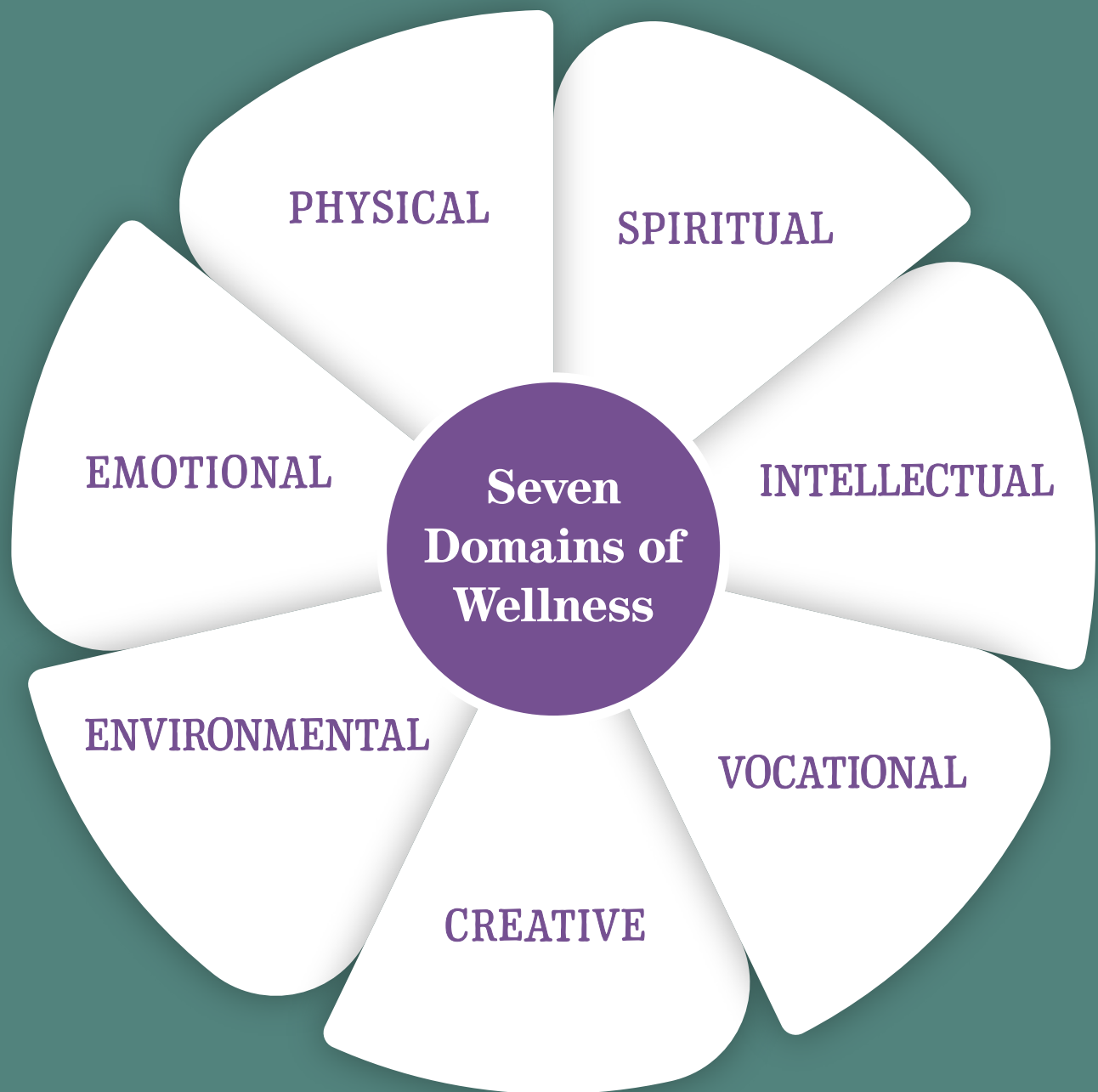
***But it doesn't have to be that way.***

Older adults with dementia can benefit from activities specifically designed to stimulate one or more of the seven domains of wellness. These domains encompass seven interdependent dimensions of wellness: physical, spiritual, creative, vocational, emotional, environmental, and intellectual.

At Sage Eldercare and The Hummingbird Project, the seven domains of wellness guide our practice. We create and deliver products and services specifically designed to nourish these domains. Our attention to clients' total wellness engages curiosity, fosters personal expression, and creates joyful moments, to promote holistic quality of life.

In this guide, our eldercare experts and therapeutic activity specialists share 10 easy and fun activities to engage older adults, especially those with dementia. These activities can be adapted for any cognitive limitations and should be personalized to your client or loved one's interests and life story.

As you and your activity partner embark on these fun activities, focus on the positive—what your partner *can* do.





# 1. TAKE A THEMED WALK IN NATURE

## PHYSICAL DOMAIN

Physical movement benefits the body, mind, and emotions and helps maintain high-level brain functioning. These benefits are amplified when we exercise outdoors, breathe fresh air, and connect with nature. By setting a theme for walks (or rolls for individuals in wheelchairs), you can add an extra sense of purpose to any stroll around the neighborhood or another outdoor area.

### ***Here are a few ideas to get you started:***

- Choose a color and see how often you can spot that color on your walk.
- Collect leaves along the way. When you're back home, observe and talk about the features of each leaf and the differences between the leaves. (Check out Activity #7 on this list for an arts-based activity using the leaves in your collection.)
- Does your activity partner love dogs? See how many you can spot on your walk and discuss each animal's unique features. Is the dog big or small? Fluffy or sleek? Talk about dogs you each had as pets in your lifetime.
- Look up at the sky and identify shapes and figures forming in the clouds above. Observe and describe them to each other. Or simply relax and watch them float by!
- Identify trees you see on your walk. Start a conversation with your activity partner about a tree that is special to them. Maybe one they grew up with or one they currently enjoy. Talk about that tree's attributes in detail. Is it strong? Is it tall? Does it flower? You can even follow up by drawing the tree when you return from the walk.

## 2. DISCOVER AND CREATE MANDALAS

### SPIRITUAL DOMAIN

Spiritual wellness connects us to something greater than ourselves and brings more profound meaning and satisfaction to our lives. Mandalas, or Wheels of Life, are sacred circles that have been used for centuries in Indian and Tibetan religious traditions. People create and look at mandalas to center the body and mind, and they are often used as a healing tool.

- Look at pictures of mandalas in books or online with your client or loved one.
- Talk about the colors and patterns. How do they make you feel?
- Now try coloring mandalas with crayons or colored pencils. Print out a black-and-white picture of a mandala to color—or use a mandala coloring book, available online and in bookstores and craft stores.
- Don't overthink your choice of colors. Let your instincts guide you.
- People who color mandalas often experience a deep sense of calm and well-being.





### 3. RESEARCH AND DISCUSS YOUR NAMES

#### INTELLECTUAL DOMAIN

Intellectual stimulation helps preserve cognitive functionality in older adults. An engaging discussion on the meaning and story behind your names is a sure way to connect, teach, and learn. This activity can serve as an opportunity to share family stories and history. You'll discover that this simple activity helps to activate memories.

- Do you know what your names mean? If you need help, you can quickly look them up online or in a baby names book.
- Is there a story behind your name? What name would you choose if you were to name yourself?
- What about nicknames? What were the nicknames you or your family members had growing up? Is there a story behind the nicknames?
- Now explore these same questions with the names of children, spouses, and other family and friends.

## 4. ENJOY A LITTLE BIRD WATCHING



### INTELLECTUAL / EMOTIONAL DOMAINS

Bird watching is a simple and fun activity for animal lovers and birders alike. Your client or loved one may have birds right outside their door, or this may be an opportunity to drive to an area where wildlife can be seen.

- Can you identify the birds you see or hear? How many different bird calls can you hear?
- Do you have a favorite bird or bird call?
- See where the conversation leads as you talk with your activity partner about what you observe.
- To evoke mentally stimulating dialogue, you can take it further by watching a well-known nature film about birds, such as *Fly Away Home* or *Winged Migration*.
- There are many books on bird calls and bird identification that can lead to future activities of interest and inspiration!
- A popular app you can download to identify birds is Merlin Bird ID from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Click [here](#) to find out more.

# 5. REMEMBER CAREERS

## VOCATIONAL DOMAIN

Activities that foster vocational wellness help us feel like productive members of society and boost our sense of usefulness and self-worth. A past career may be important to your client or loved one's life story and identity.

- Start by reminiscing about your client or loved one's career or volunteer role. Be sure to honor the contributions they made as a working adult!
- Ask questions and listen intently to their answers.
- The most important thing is for your activity partner to feel seen and heard, especially around a topic in which they've enjoyed expertise.
- Repeat back important things you heard. For example, "Your interest in airplanes is inspiring. It is wonderful to hear you talk about when you were a pilot."
- You may also find meaningful ways to reconnect with their previous work. Identify a topic related to their past career and then search online for an article or video covering the subject. Read or watch it together and discuss what you think.





## 6. BUILD A MODEL PLANE

### INTELLECTUAL DOMAIN

Building a model plane challenges dexterity, sequencing, and creativity. It also gives purpose to your time together and can be a great starting point to revisit old memories.

- Look for a model airplane kit at your local toy store, hobby store, or online. If possible, have your client or loved one help you pick out the model.
- If your activity partner is particularly interested in or has a history with a specific plane type or aviation era, try to find a related model.
- When you're ready to begin, find a quiet space to work together. Assist as necessary, and don't be afraid to go slowly.
- If possible, leave the work-in-progress out for people to see while it's being built. Display the completed model so visitors can see it. This will undoubtedly trigger questions and future interactions. You and your activity partner can take pride in the tangible result of your efforts!

# 7. MAKE LEAF RUBBINGS

## CREATIVE DOMAIN

Arts-based activities help older adults have a better quality of life and more easily maintain some independence. You and your client or loved one can tap into creativity with leaf rubbings. They're easy and fun to make.

- If possible, start by taking a walk outside. (See Activity #1.) Work together to fill a bag with leaves, talking about each leaf. Describe its color and shape.
- Do you know what kind of leaf it is? Is it from a tree or bush unique to your area?
- For this project, you'll also need paper—thinner and lighter-weight paper is best—as well as crayons, pastels, or charcoal.
- When you have all your materials gathered, arrange the leaves on a flat surface, veins facing up.
- Place a piece of paper over the leaves and use a crayon or pastel on its side to shade over the leaf firmly.
- An image of the leaf will appear on the paper, highlighting the veins and edges.
- If you like, use your leaf rubbings to make note cards to send to family, friends, and neighbors.



## 8. SING AND DANCE

### PHYSICAL / CREATIVE DOMAINS

Music is a powerful tool to connect with people living with dementia. Concerts, community music events, or even a private dance session in your client or loved one's living room or backyard can bring joy and engagement.

- Choose music your client or loved one enjoys or has a personal connection to.
- Encourage movement, whether dancing or simply clapping along to the rhythm.
- Be mindful of the volume and type of music, ensuring it is soothing and not overwhelming.
- Look for local concerts in parks that provide a fun outing and an opportunity to listen to music.



# 9. FOLLOW YOUR NOSE

## ENVIRONMENTAL DOMAIN

Feeling harmonious in their environment helps older adults remain more independent, active, and engaged. The sense of smell can be a powerful tool for connecting us to our environment, tapping into old memories, and boosting mood.

- Spend time with your client or loved one exploring the scents of essential oils, favorite perfumes, fresh flowers, spices, or baked goods. Feel free to use items you or your activity partner already have around the house.
- Reflect on scents that have special significance to you and your partner. Perhaps it's a favorite soap, aftershave, or shampoo. Maybe your client or loved one has always delighted in the smell of fresh-cut grass on a summer day or their mother's cold cream.
- You may be surprised at the stories that emerge and the memories and emotions scents can evoke!



## 10. SHARE A BAG OF SURPRISES

### EMOTIONAL DOMAIN

Activities that support emotional wellness help older adults cope with stressful events and life changes. This activity indulges the delight of little surprises, and it can be done repeatedly.

- Make a habit of bringing a bag of surprises when you visit your client or loved one.
- Anything that fits in the bag is fair game: a treat to eat, a family photo, a drawing by a grandchild, a favorite magazine, or a book of poems.
- The items can give your visit a purpose or theme so you have something specific to share or talk about that day.
- The mystery and anticipation surrounding the bag's contents will inspire curiosity, connection, and excitement.





# HELPFUL RESOURCES

The Hummingbird Project's Joyful Moments are activity cards that give tools to re-engage older adults. In addition to the activities outlined in this e-book, family members and care providers find Joyful Moments activities helpful in engaging older adults. Click [here](#) to learn more.

Our monthly newsletter focuses on ways to enhance the quality of life for older adults and provides ideas, inspiration, and tips on how to help older adults and people living with dementia experience purpose and joy. You can sign up [here](#).

You can find out more about The Hummingbird Project's therapeutic activity program on our website [here](#). Sage Eldercare Services also offers best-in-class home care and care management services. Click [here](#) for more information.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kari Rogenski, LMFT, is the Director of The Hummingbird Project, a concierge in-person and virtual therapeutic activity program. Kari is a licensed psychotherapist and clinical supervisor. She is pursuing her Ph.D. in Humanistic Psychology at Saybrook University, where she studies creativity and gerontology.

**[Follow Kari on LinkedIn.](#)**



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