



The Montessori Approach for Dementia



The Montessori approach for dementia care is based on the educational philosophies of childhood educator Dr. Maria Montessori. Dr. Cameron Camp discovered that Dr. Montessori's philosophies and principles could be effectively adapted as an approach for dementia care.

First in, last out.

The first skill someone learns is the last skill they lose.

Declarative vs. procedural memory

It is important to understand the type of memory that is spared in dementia, **procedural memory** – such as **how to eat, how to dress, or reading**. The memory that dementia targets (**declarative memory** – such as **family names, how to get to the grocery store, events**) must be addressed in a supportive environment.

Putting the Montessori method into practice

The Montessori approach focuses on re-discovering and supporting the person behind the dementia. Activities with meaning and purpose are put back into people's lives, based on their needs, interests, skills and abilities.

People with dementia often feel they are always being told what to. They are **adults** and often do not need to be told, but they do want to be needed and feel useful.

Montessori methods help reduce and prevent challenging behaviours associated with dementia. Boredom and loneliness are reduced through activities that embrace roles, routines, and improve self-esteem.

When the person isn't capable of "remembering" important information, the cues should be available in his/her environment.

First, get to know your client – their history, family, interests, abilities, and activities that help, maintain or improve physical function. **What are their strengths?**

Next page: Hands-on activities to do with clients

Montessori principles for dementia:

- The environment is tailored to the person's unique needs.
- Persons with dementia maintain or learn a skill with repetition.
- Demonstrate each activity to ensure the person understands what he/she is expected to do.
- Activities should enable individuals to be as independent as possible.
- People need high self-esteem and the chance to make meaningful contributions to their community.



Consider how these hands-on activities can be used in clients' homes:

- Use a calendar or date book to show the day's activities instead of repeating or reminding the client of what is happening. Eventually the person will go to the calendar without prompting.
- Start folding and sorting laundry. Give clothes to the client and ask for their help.
- Use photo albums as visual cues for storytelling, stimulating memory and creating positive feelings.
- Wash dishes together. Give the client a towel and they may start to dry the dishes. Repeat by asking for help.
- Ask the person to tell you stories from their childhood. Write them down and then ask the client to read the stories to a grandchild. This activity is meaningful in creating a family history and helping the person feel needed by his/her family.
- Play sorting games with pictures of the person's hobbies. If the person enjoyed gardening, sort flower pictures by colour. Provide a cue to help the person remember where each item will be placed by putting one red flower in front of the person and one yellow flower beside it.
- Sort colours (put all the pink balls into a pink pail, all blue in a blue pail) as above.
- Play cards by matching red or black cards, or sort clubs, diamonds, spades and hearts.
- Walking for exercise maintains strength, balance, and helps to prevent falls.
- Play Wii games.
- Write out instructions for routines like brushing teeth. Place picture signs on bathrooms, the fridge, and other places of importance or danger.
- Medication management: Use phone or watch alarms and blister packs for scheduling medications.
- Use a smart phone, BlackBerry or watch for people who can learn to use it for scheduling or reminders. This will help maintain independence as declarative memory declines.
- Label cupboards and doors with what is inside.

Resources and References:

- ❖ **Alzheimer's Society:** Local chapters have a list of day programs, educational consultants and social workers who can provide support on an ongoing basis. (www.alzheimer.ca)
- ❖ **McMaster University's** Gilbrea Centre for Studies in Aging offers Montessori Methods for Dementia™, 2-day training sessions. (www.aging.mcmaster.ca)
- ❖ **Myers Research Institute** Montessori-Based Dementia Programming® (MBDP) (www.myersresearch.org)
- ❖ **Regional Geriatric Programs**, or local hospital or community-based geriatric clinic/outreach teams, can provide consultation for diagnosis and management of medical and behavioural issues (www.rgps.on.ca)