

Creating a Memory Box for Residents with Dementia

Research shows that talking with people who have Alzheimer's disease or other dementias about their lives can create positive emotional experiences, reduce stress and provide a better quality of life. Memory boxes can help produce these beneficial responses by connecting residents to what they love or help them feel comfortable and happy.



How to Create

A Memory Box can take many forms—a basket, a plastic container, a drawer or a shoebox. It can be decorative or simple. Just make sure it is big and sturdy enough to hold a variety of items. Include the resident and the resident's family in choosing a container or a box and in coming up with keepsakes. Perhaps grandchildren can decorate the box or help contribute to the collection.

What to Include

The memory box can include anything that means something to the resident. The contents should reflect the resident's interests or his or her favorite things or memories. Remember that experiences stored in our brains are not just visual, so try to include items with different textures, scents or sounds. Keepsake ideas for the memory box can include:

- Family photos (Be sure to label photos with names and perhaps the year they were taken.)
- Favorite book(s)
- Baseball glove, baseball, hockey puck, etc.
- Different types of fabrics the resident finds appealing or comforting
- Flower petals, pinecones and/or leaves
- Perfume or lotion
- Children or grandchildren's artwork
- Gardening gloves
- A family heirloom
- Vacation souvenirs
- A trophy or medal
- Seashells or a dried starfish
- Letter(s) from a loved one
- A favorite recipe
- Sheet music or a musical instrument
- A favorite CD

What Else to Consider

When choosing keepsakes for the memory box, be sure to think about safety. Avoid sharp or heavy items. Consider whether the resident has dexterity problems and might have trouble holding any of the items. Be sure to focus on keepsakes that are linked to a positive experience or memory. If the item is rare or irreplaceable, consider leaving it out of the box, so it does not get lost or damaged. The resident may not recognize some of the items or understand why they were included, so labeling the items with a tag or sticker might be helpful. You can also include a piece of paper that lists all the items with a short sentence or phrase about each one.



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Sources: "5 Reasons to Make a Memory Box for Alzheimer's Patients," www.alzheimers.net; "Creating a Memory Box," www.helpforalzheimersfamilies.com; "New App Helps Caregivers Build 'Memory Box' for Alzheimer's Patients," www.dementiatoday.com