



# The Activity Year Book

A Week by Week Guide for Use in Elderly Day and Residential Care



Anni Bowden and Nancy Lewthwaite



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*A Week by Week Guide for Use  
in Elderly Day and Residential Care*

ANNI BOWDEN AND NANCY LEWTHWAITE



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# Getting Started

We all know that people who are engaged in some kind of activity, who are occupied, have a happier and more fulfilled life, but we don't always know how to go about providing the right type of activity for them. This book can help to give you ideas and ways of doing just that. Some may be more useful than others, but you can adapt most to your own circumstances. The majority of the ideas cost little more than your time and can be as easy as simply replanning your day – but all of them are diverting and (we think) mostly *fun!*

## How to run a group

The right group leader is most important

A designated activity organiser is essential as the person who will prepare and evaluate the activities. Time should be allowed for this, possibly Friday afternoon, ready for the next week. He or she should feel confident in presenting to a number of people, have an outgoing personality and be able to support both colleagues and group members. Our own activity organiser reached the point of being unable to go anywhere without wondering how what she saw or did could be used in a group activity!

## The group

Do invite people to the group – some people hate to be a 'joiner' but may still decide to come in next time when they hear the laughter!

A circle is the best way of ensuring that everyone can see the presenter and the flipchart. Speak clearly and slowly to make sure everyone hears and understands the activities. Allow plenty of time for people to answer questions and complete the activities.

## Staffing the group

At least two staff members are needed to run a group, in case someone requires the toilet, needs help to read or write, has hearing difficulties (a microphone can be really useful if many people are hearing impaired), or needs things explaining more. Prepare the circle of chairs

before the group begins. It is best if staff sit opposite each other in the circle. It is important that everything is to hand before running the group, and that facilitators know what they are doing.

When making copies of items, enlarging them may make them more user-friendly.

One staff member will be the 'scribe' and write on the flipchart – so it is essential that they feel comfortable in writing and spelling. We found it useful to have a stack of magazines for group members to 'rest' paper on for writing.

All the items required for any activity should be prepared in advance and ready to use. Maybe a special group box will help to achieve this.

When leading the reminiscence and discussion, let people have their say, as they like to share life experiences. Encourage the group to listen and ask questions. Sometimes it may be necessary to use the prompts or your own/family experiences to get the group to relax about the topic.

We found we really appreciated the group more as individuals when we learnt of the hardships they had overcome. We also found some amazing hidden talents and skills. This helped us to make fewer snap judgements of people and reduced unconscious ageism – which in turn led to everyone becoming much closer.

It is essential that time is given for the group members to answer. Give support to enable them to do so, and also encourage group members to allow each other time and support. We found this very soon happened spontaneously and really created group bonding. It is important that the group and *not* the staff answer the questions! If either the questions or the answers provoke discussion, let this develop as a natural spin-off to the group's enjoyment.

*All* staff must respect the importance of the group and should only interrupt an activity if it is absolutely necessary. They should also make sure that any noisy work or discussion takes place away from the group room.

Each group session follows a similar pattern:

1. outline of the theme for the week
2. reminiscence and discussion
3. opportunity to share information
4. linked quizzes, word games
5. observation activity or a poem.

For people with memory problems or dementia there are activities that have a sensory component, or more physical games such as adapted 'beetle' or 'target' games.

Each of the following weekly guides begins with a list of equipment required.

## The activities

### Aims of the activities

- socialising and interacting with others
- communication skills practice – listening, taking turns and speaking

- sharing experience and reminiscence
- use of both short- and long-term memory
- physical activity and hand–eye coordination
- use of cognitive skills
- *fun* – for staff too! – remember, laughter has been proved to be the best medicine.

## Evaluating the activities

It is a good idea to spend a few minutes after the group to discuss how it went, what worked, what didn't, what can you make easier, more fun? There is an evaluation sheet at the back of the book, which may be useful. We entered group attendance and reactions in clients' notes – this can be very positive for letting relatives know that their loved ones are happy – especially if the client forgets to tell them what they have been doing during the week. It may also be useful for NVQ. It will underline the importance of activities to all staff, and increase a client-centred approach.

In a residential setting it would be possible to use all the activities by using just the reminiscence and discussion on Day 1, then introducing one activity, with a reminder of the theme, each day for the rest of the week. People are more easily tired and lose concentration more easily when they are frail.

In day care, if people attend more than one day per week they can easily join in the reminiscence session by listening to others, which may stimulate more memories for themselves, and they can join in any activities that were not used on their previous attendance. (It is not necessary to complete the whole programme each day, far better to let things flow naturally, if something is going well, and save unused activities for another day.) The book is in monthly segments, but it is not necessary to follow this rigidly. However, it may be useful until the activity organiser has grown in confidence and begins to 'pick and mix' or invent their own themed weeks.

The following books were used in planning the activities:

- *The Stroke Activity Book* compiled by Valerie Eaton Griffith, Elizabeth Pepys and Sue Miller (1992). Published by the Stroke Association. (Now unfortunately out of print.)
- *Language and Word Activities* by Judith Queenborough (1998). Published by Speechmark Publishing, Bicester.
- *Mental Aerobics* by Nancy J. Lewthwaite. Published by Nancy in 1986.
- *More Mental Aerobics* by Nancy J. Lewthwaite. Also published by Nancy in 1993. (Nancy can be contacted via her website [www.mentalaerobics.net](http://www.mentalaerobics.net))
- *Puzzler Magazine* Puzzler Media Ltd, Redhill.

Some other useful books:

*Remembering Yesterday, Caring Today* (2008) by Pam Schweitzer and Errollyn Bruce.  
Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.

*The Pool (PAL) Instrument for Occupational Profiling Activity Level* (2007) by Jackie Pool  
Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.

## The active day

1. Meet and greet – welcome each person by name (first name if permission has been given). This is a really positive approach, as often people who live alone will not have heard their own name spoken for some time, and this will serve to affirm their individuality and sense of self.
2. Over coffee ask each person how they are today, have an exchange of news – theirs and yours – and discuss any important news of the day. Encourage conversation between clients.
3. Bingo...to accommodate all those people who enjoy this game – there are quite a number!
4. Walk into dining room for lunch.
5. Walk back into lounge area for snooze, magazine/newspaper reading, lunchtime TV, tabletop games such as Scrabble, whist, draughts.
6. Armchair exercises – to get the circulation going.
7. Cup of tea.
8. Themed activity session for an hour.
9. Walk into dining room for tea.

Walking from one area to another can dramatically increase exercise levels for the day, involving balance practice and getting in and out of chairs, as well as mobilising.