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Emotions & Environment

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If we take the time to sit back and look around us, we can determine in a short period of time what is comforting and what is annoying or agitating to us. A comfortable environment is one that we gravitate toward and have warm relaxed feelings about. We judge places in a few seconds on the information we receive through our five senses on how comfortable we will be there.

Many studies over a number of years have supported the idea that environment is a critical component on one's feelings and behavior. Below are listed a number of ideas and suggestions that can be utilized in changing the environment in a positive manner.

COLOR

Determine what you want rooms to be conducive to and what feelings you wish to convey. We should always try to use colors that the person finds comforting and enjoyed throughout their life.

- Peaceful and calming feeling: Pastel blues and green colors
- Active and energetic area: Warmer colors of reds and yellows
- Neutral colored rooms: Can be dramatically changed through the use of color accents, such as, pillows, comforters, pictures, or other items placed in strategic locations.
- Determine function of room: Arrange the colors to suit the purpose.
- Contrast colors: It is helpful to use contrasting colors for older individuals to better discriminate objects. Every day items such as toilet seats, drawer or cabinet door handles, tissue holders and other items that need to be manipulated or used through the day. It is a lot easier to find and use something that stands out instead of blending into the environment. Take for example a white toilet seat on a white toilet next to a white wall. This is very difficult to see, especially if someone's vision is impaired. By placing a blue or green seat on the white background, this immediately brings our focus to the toilet, which may have been just a blur before. Anything we can do to contrast colors in a pleasing way and make finding objects easier will be less frustrating and allow individuals to maintain their independence longer.

MUSIC

Music has a wonderful therapeutic value and can set and maintain an emotion or mood for and extended amount of time.

- Play music from their era: May act as a catalyst to provide conversation and interaction. This can bring back some wonderful memories.
- Relax or energize: Depending on preference or desired outcome. In most cases, the

more relaxing the music, the more relaxing the environment becomes and vice versa, the more upbeat the music, the more energy seems to be in the room. This is a normal reaction to our response to stimulation in the environment.

- Background music: Most often this should be instrumental in nature and not overpowering in volume or tempo.

Music is often used in retail stores, restaurants and recently in health care facilities and other areas where mood and behavior are important aspects. Music can be used as a wonderful activity and conversation piece. We must always remember that music is very effective and comforting, but the wrong music can be bothersome or even agitate the person. Utilize music as often as possible - it is a powerful therapeutic tool if used wisely.

BRINGING NATURE INDOORS

The beauty of nature in all forms should be utilized whenever possible. Objects that remind us of nature project a calming, healing, and at times a spiritual aspect to our lives.

- Plants and flowers - real or artificial
 - Used to break up harsh corners and sharp lines in a room to provide softness.
 - Floor, table or hanging plants can be used throughout the home/room to enhance the feeling of being outside and enjoying the gentle stimulation of nature.
 - Real plants also clean the air while providing fresh air to breath, which is an added benefit.
 - Colors and textures of individual plants add to the stimulation of the home in a positive and gentle way that enhances the environment in which one resides.
- Indoor fountain: A small indoor fountain can be very soothing and visually comforting. It reminds one of a gently stream or brook that runs through the woods.
- Prints, pictures, and photomurals: There are colorful prints that depict beautiful scenes of nature that can be utilized throughout the environment

WINDOWS

Always consider the windows we look out of to be living pictures. Think in terms of providing items that are pleasing and non-threatening to look at.

- Bird baths, feeders, plant trees or bushes: Attract birds to be in view which will bring life and spontaneity to the moment.
- Chimes or mobiles: Gently move with the wind
- Soft white outdoor lights: Place on trees and shrubs to provide a soft glow in the dark days of winter and an elegant atmosphere in the summer.
- Look through different windows at various times: Determine what views can provide entertainment and place a comfortable chair nearby. Are there children playing, sprinklers watering the lawn, or cars driving by? Many times the view through a window is a great source of comfort and pleasure.

ANIMALS

Animals have been found to be therapeutic and rewarding to have in one's environment. If individuals have enjoyed the comfort of pets and the life they bring, then when possible, attempt to provide this for them even if it is just for a limited amount of time.

- Visits: If the individual is unable to care for pet, bring your pet or ask a neighbor to stop by with their dog.
- Dogs and cats: Petting dogs or stroking a cat can be very comforting and soothing.
- Birds and fish: The sound of a bird singing in their cage or the gentle movements of fish in an aquarium provides soft gentle stimulation throughout the day.
- Stuffed animals or realistic statues: Some individuals may have difficulties with having real animals around. They may enjoy looking at or holding stuffed animals. This can be both an enjoyable and comforting tool to use in the environment

SPIRITUALITY

If a person is of a spiritual nature and finds it meaningful to have religious items within the environment, then do so.

- Bibles, religious books, or tracts: Placed in different rooms within view provide moments of joy and peace
- Religious statues and symbols: When outside the window or placed indoors, can be very helpful and supportive to a positive mood.
- Pictures or items depicting religious beliefs: Placing these on the wall can provide tranquility and sense of security to the individual
- Religious music and programs: Utilize when possible and as enjoyed

These are a few ideas that can be used within a person's environment that can both provide comfort and stimulation to enhance the quality of life for individuals. Take time to look at each area and determine what you can do, be creative and don't be afraid to try.

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