

Babydolls and Dementia Care?! Let's break it down!



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When discussing the use of a baby doll to engage with their loved one, family caregivers often express feelings of discomfort. This is a natural response, but it's also an opportunity to reconsider the idea with a fresh perspective. Several studies have shown that dolls can provide many benefits for people living with dementia, including helping to decrease “undesirable” behaviors that are commonly seen. Some of the behaviors include agitation, aggressiveness, wandering, and anguish, to name a few ([Martin, et al., 2022](#)).

Tools in Dementia Care

It is important to know about the non-pharmacological “tools” that are available to the dementia community. Baby dolls are commonly employed as a “tool” or “therapy” in dementia care, not only helping to reduce those “undesirable” behaviors but to provide comfort, and facilitate reminiscing. They can also foster a sense of purpose, and company, promote attachment, and enhance overall well-being by allowing individuals to engage in familiar nurturing behaviors. (Martin, et al., 2022). Studies show that people living with dementia show actions such as holding, talking, feeding, cuddling, or dressing and more engagement levels when dolls are available ([Mitchell et al., 2016](#)).

Introducing Dolls

The method of introducing the dolls may vary, but a general guideline is to let the person living with dementia take the lead. Leave the doll in a visible place where they can "discover" it. Once they notice the doll, you can gauge their reaction and proceed accordingly. If they recognize it as a doll, you can simply comment on its appearance or casually mention finding an old toy. If they perceive the doll as a real baby, you can engage them in a discussion about babies and their sweetness. Allow them to guide the conversation and provide feedback on their perception of the doll. Some individuals may immediately seek comfort by holding the doll without saying anything. Allow them to find solace in their way. Understand that the effectiveness of using the doll may vary from day to day or even from moment to moment. Continue offering the doll or keeping it accessible for them to use as they see fit.

Respect and Dignity

It's crucial to approach this with sensitivity and respect for the individual's dignity and autonomy. This begins with challenging our preconceptions and stigmas surrounding this caregiving tool. Educating ourselves and others can help support individuals living with dementia and enhance their quality of life. All in all, we should support approaches that bring joy to our loved ones living with dementia.

Conclusion

Utilizing different approaches and tools in dementia care is vital to learning how to best care for each individual. Interests, comforts, and more can change throughout a person's life, and it is helpful when the caregiver can find ways to bring connection, joy, and meaning to their everyday world





Key things to remember:

- Baby dolls can bring comfort, engagement, and a sense of purpose to people living with dementia.
- Your loved one's preferences and interests may change. Don't hesitate to try again a little later if the initial reaction is negative.
- Everyone is different, so it is worth trying new approaches with an open mind.

Meet the author



Carrie Aalberts works with Euforia as an Education and Business Development Specialist. She holds her master's degree in gerontology and over a decade in the senior care industry. Carrie is dedicated to uplifting the dementia community. She can be found on social media as Dementia Darling.

Resources:

Martín-García A, Corregidor-Sánchez A-I, Fernández-Moreno V, Alcántara-Porcuna V, Criado-Álvarez J-J. Effect of Doll Therapy in Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia: A Systematic Review. *Healthcare*. 2022; 10(3):421. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10030421>

Mitchell, G., McCormack, B., and McCance, T. (2016). Therapeutic Use of Dolls for People Living with Dementia: A Critical Review of the Literature. *Dementia* 15, 976–1001. doi:10.1177/1471301214548522


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