



Engaging in activities is crucial for people living with dementia. They can help maintain cognitive, physical, emotional and social well-being, while also offering opportunities for self-expression. Activities can promote a sense of accomplishment and purpose, which is important for brain health and overall quality of life.

Memory kits are valuable resources designed to stimulate conversation, encourage reminiscing and provide opportunities for meaningful engagement for people living with dementia. Library professionals play a key role in curating these kits, which can help people living with dementia, their care partners, families and friends form connections and enjoy enriching activities.

### What are memory kits?

Memory kits are collections of items that evoke memories, spark conversations and engage individuals in meaningful activities. While anyone can benefit from these kits, they are specifically designed to help people living with dementia recall memories and connect. Memory loss and confusion are common symptoms of dementia, and the right items—like photographs, music and memorabilia—can trigger long-cherished memories and facilitate communication.

### Creating memory kits for your library

Memory kits can contain a range of items that provoke memories, encourage conversation and offer opportunities for

engagement. These kits can be created around a theme (e.g., old-time movies, childhood memories or hobbies) or can simply be collections of activities and objects that provide cognitive stimulation.

To start, find a container – a shoe box, Tupperware, an old purse, an unused drawer or even a reusable bag – whatever you have on hand or that might be meaningful to the person living with dementia or connect directly to the theme of the memory kit. You can even decorate the container if you like.

### Suggested themes for memory kits

- **Travel:** Include postcards, photos, guidebooks and souvenir-like trinkets to trigger memories of past travels.
- **Fashion:** Provide old clothing, jewelry or fashion magazines that evoke nostalgia.
- **Cooking:** Include recipes, cookbooks and cooking utensils that might inspire food-related memories.

- **Rummage bag:** Include items like costume jewelry, a handkerchief, a wallet with coins or a small mirror and a paperback novel. These personal objects can bring back memories of the past.
- **Woodworking theme:** Include simple wooden objects like a birdhouse kit, some sandpaper, washable paints and home magazines. This theme could appeal to someone with a passion for carpentry or crafting.
- **Gardening:** Include photographs, gardening magazines, gardening gloves and fake flowers, to evoke memories of time spent in the garden and encourage the person living with dementia to get outdoors.

## Suggested content

- **Books and magazines:** Large-print books, magazines, short stories or poetry collections can encourage reading.
- **Games:** Simple games like jigsaw puzzles, cards, dominoes or board games can help stimulate cognitive skills and can be adjusted to match the person's abilities.
- **Music:** CDs, DVDs or song lists from YouTube and Spotify and sing-along events can be especially engaging and can evoke long-term memories.
- **Puzzles:** Jigsaw puzzles with large pieces or word puzzles with simple instructions.



### Memory Kit #7: Food Theme

#### Contents:

- 3 utensils
- Cookbook
- Recipe card
- Empty spice containers
- Activity suggestion sheet

- **Trivia:** Use cards from old trivia games or print trivia questions from the internet to spark conversation.
- **Conversation starters:** Daily calendars with jokes or word definitions, journals with prompts or a box of conversation starters can start a great discussion.
- **Photographs:** Photos can help trigger memories and facilitate storytelling.

**Tip:** Consider hosting a memory kit building workshop for your patrons.

### Memory kit activity

You may even consider hosting reminiscence circles, where people living with dementia and care partners come together as a group to explore a memory kit together and share stories with one another. The following tips are here to guide you as you help people living with dementia engage in these activities. Some may apply more than others, depending on where they are in their journey, but consider these factors as you move forward:

- **Activity rest vs. engagement:** Not everyone needs to be busy all the time. Balancing rest with engagement is key. Some people enjoy doing things all the time, others may need a chance to rest and look out the window.
- **Consider activity lengths and overstimulation:** Break activities into shorter sessions if necessary. Watch for signs of fatigue or frustration and adjust accordingly.

- **Level of support needed:** Adapt your level of involvement based on the person's preference and needs. Some people can work independently with little or no direction. Others may need you close by for support or encouragement.
- **Choose appropriate activity times:** Consider the time of day and their current energy level when planning activities. Mornings and early afternoons may be ideal for people living with dementia.
- **Focus on enjoying the process, not the result:** Celebrate small successes and focus on how the activity makes the person living with dementia feel, rather than completing it perfectly. The goal is not to "finish" the activity but to enjoy the experience.

**Personalized memory kits:** Memory kits can also be personalized to reflect the interests and life experiences of the person living with dementia. If your library is interested in helping your patrons curate a personalized memory kit, you can ask the person living with dementia and/or their care partner about the person's hobbies, interests and past (e.g., what did they do for work) to build a kit specifically designed for them.

## Tips for dementia-friendly communication

Memory kits can be a powerful way to engage with people living with dementia, spark memories and encourage meaningful interactions. Consider the following ways to communicate effectively:

### Create a calm and comfortable environment:

- Choose a quiet space with minimum distractions.
- Ensure there is adequate lighting and seating arrangements.

### Use simple and structured questions:

- Encourage natural storytelling and reduce the pressure to participate.
- Instead of asking, “do you remember this?” try asking “this looks like an old radio, did you ever listen to one like this?”

### Verbal communication:

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Give one message at a time, allow pauses for them to process and respond.

- Connect, don't correct - go along with their reality, avoid correcting or contradicting them if they misremember details.

### Non-verbal communication:

- Ensure your body language is calm, welcoming and patient.
- Engage all senses, encourage touch (feeling the object or holding it), smell (if the kit includes a candle or other such items) and sound (play the radio if it works, or music if possible) - these can trigger emotions and memories.

### Pivot, as needed:

- If the activity is not going as planned, or if the person living with dementia seems disengaged, pause, redirect and try again later
- If they don't recall details, give prompts like “I wonder if this photo reminds you of your family vacations?”

For more information, or to learn more about dementia and dementia-friendly communities, reach out to the **Alzheimer Society of British Columbia and Yukon** or visit the **Dementia-Friendly Canada website**.



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