

Assisting with Grooming and Hygiene

Five Tips To Make GEMS Shine!

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Think about your daily grooming routine. Do you perform a particular sequence of steps each time? Do you have a favorite personal product? How do the results of your grooming routine make you uniquely you? How do you feel when you complete the routine?

For a Person Living with Dementia (PLwD), how is their grooming and hygiene the same or different than it used to be?

Men and women alike have grooming and hygiene routines that create a sense of unique identity throughout their lifetime; the same routine performed on a daily basis over decades: shaving, applying makeup, styling hair or manicuring nails.

However, with the onset and progression of dementia things have changed. “I am who I was, but I’m different – I’ve lost skill, language, and safety awareness.” As care partners, how can we support a PLwD to perform the grooming routines that reflect their identity – still deeply embedded within the individual?

Care partners, consider these 5 tips to help GEMS shine:

PREPARE

Dementia is an ever-changing disease. This can lead to what we deem to be surprising reactions that we didn’t anticipate, but are often a result of our focus on the task instead of their perception or what they may be wanting/needing in that moment. Knowing this, care partners can prepare for several aspects of the interaction to decrease distress:

Environment - Create a set up that is as close to the person’s previous routine as possible. Where did the person typically perform grooming – in the bathroom or at a dressing table? Is there a sink and mirror positioned for the PLwD to notice their reflection? Are warm towels available? Do you have all the items you will need close at hand? Do you have enough physical space to adequately support?

Familiarity - My Gramma used Oil of Olay – a scent that will always remind me of her. When possible, use products that have a mild scent that is familiar; if caring in a facility be aware of restrictions for the use of strong scents. What was the individual’s past grooming routine and style – did she prefer a more natural look or fully made up? Make an effort to use the same tools (electric shaver vs razor, comb, makeup applicator) that the PLwD is accustomed to using.

Time – When actively care partnering, we can be pressed for time, yet grooming and hygiene is an activity of daily living that requires a slow pace and attention to detail. Be prepared to set your agenda aside and be present in the person's moment.

PAUSE & BREATHE

Before initiating an interaction, take a few moments to assess the PLwD's emotional state - is she calm or distressed?

Take a deep breath and release fully. Now take two more. Notice how you feel more relaxed. When our stress level goes down, our brains work better and enable us to be flexible.

During the activity, be aware of what is working and what isn't working. Be prepared to pause and say, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to do that."

POSITIVE PHYSICAL APPROACH™ (PPA™)

We perform grooming and hygiene activities in intimate space and apply light touch to body parts that are highly sensitive (face, mouth, hands). Before entering a PLwD's intimate space, ensure you have permission using PPA:

Approach slowly, continuing with a dynamic assessment of the PLwD's emotional state.

Pause at the edge of personal space (approximately 2 arm lengths away) and within their visual range – consider the visual abilities for their current GEMS state (scuba vision, binocular, monocular).

Greet with their name and your name, extend your hand in a handshake, wait for them to accept your handshake, and move into supportive stance on the person's dominant side.

Slide into Hand-under-Hand® (HuH), then continue to hold and apply gentle pressure to the palm of the hand.

Be friendly – offer a nice compliment or smile.

PARTICIPATE

As a part of your assessment, determine what level of assistance will be required: supervision only, assistance with task initiation and/or termination, full HuH support; note that the level of assistance required may change from day to day.

When full assistance is required, support the PLwD's dominant hand using the HuH technique and your skill fingers (thumb and first two fingers) to hold the grooming tool and apply the product, shave, or comb hair.

Guide and provide instructions one step at a time; using fewer words and more visual cues can go a long way to communicate and decrease distress – show the object (toothbrush, razor, comb), demonstrate the action on yourself and then on the PLwD.

Maintain a physical connection throughout the activity using HuH and/or placing your free hand on the person's shoulder; this provides continuous sensory feedback and gives the person the sense that you are *doing with*, rather than *doing to*.

PRAISE

When the grooming routine is complete, take a moment to show the person their reflection and compliment them on their appearance. Thank them for their participation and their hard work!

Think about when you can apply these strategies to support a PLwD with their grooming routine. By taking time to prepare, pause, use a Positive Approach, participate through support, and praise efforts, care partners can enjoy a rewarding experience supporting individuals living with dementia to participate in meaningful activities such as grooming and hygiene routines.