Engaging with Objects

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE AOE PROGRAM AT MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

The Art & Object Engagement (AOE) Program serves people living with dementia. The program uses contemporary art and social history objects from Macquarie University’s collections.

WHY ENGAGE WITH OBJECTS?
Through the AOE program we have found that objects, especially those relating to everyday life and social history, are wonderful triggers for conversation, story-telling and remembering. They are also a multi-sensory trigger that have potential to engage not just visually, but also through sound, touch, smell and, in some cases, taste.

WHAT MAKES A “GOOD OBJECT”? Consider the below factors when selecting an object:
• Is it familiar?
  • Is it an easily identifiable object from their youth?
  • Is it personal to them?
  • Is the object reminiscent of an event, person, etc from their youth?
  • Does the object incorporate familiar functions, designs, smells, etc?
• Is it strange?
  • Sometimes strange or quirky items might be just as successful as triggers for conversation if they encourage curiosity.
• Does it offer a multi-sensory experience and can it be touched without damage?
• Can you talk about it? Choose objects that you are comfortable talking about and investigating.

HOW TO USE OBJECTS FOR ENGAGEMENT? There is no right or wrong way to do this. Here are some tips that we find helpful:
• Use the object as a starting point and be prepared to go wherever the conversation takes you.
  • There is no incorrect response.
  • Positively validate the responses.
• Try to avoid asking direct memory-related questions, for example:
  • ‘What do you think this object is?’ or ‘What could it be made of?’
  • instead of ‘do you remember using this?’ ask ‘how do you think this might be used?’

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This information sheet was funded by the NSW Government, Family & Community Services Liveable Communities Grant
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