

Therapeutic Activities

Creating calm, relaxing moments can be just as important as upbeat and active sessions. Therapeutic activities linked to a theme, such as massage, meditation or chanting, enable participants to relax and de-stress. With massage in particular, the close nature of the activity helps to build trusting relationships and connections with others.

These types of activities can be challenging to create; many participants find it hard to sit down, let alone relax, and many have an aversion to being touched. It can cause great anxiety, withdrawal and even challenging behaviour. However, there are several strategies that can be employed to encourage this close interaction, particularly with the use of various mediums such as warm water, oils and material at points of contact.

Accessing the activity:

- Create a soft, safe, welcoming environment, using subdued tones for lighting. Light candles (electric tea-lights) and encourage simply lying down and relaxing in the comfy, safe space.
- Fill the space with blankets, quilts, cloths and cushions to make it seem inviting and encourage everyone to join in.
- Singing, chanting and gentle music will enhance the relaxing atmosphere. The soothing sound of an instrument is another brilliant tool in the therapy box. Calming Indian bells and/or gentle gongs are useful in this context.
- Using incense and lavender oil adds aroma and relaxing scents to the experience. Take care when using massage oils. Use soya as a safe base oil and carefully follow diluting instructions. Surprisingly, even lavender can cause allergic reactions. If worried, stick to 'sensitive' hand creams and body lotions, which work just as well.
- Have bowls of warm water, oils and lotions to show participants. Smell the scents, dip fingers in and dab on skin. Brushes can be used initially, just like using facepaint.
- Encouraging some participants to allow touch can be a long process. For those who don't like the feel of lotions/oil, try using the plants themselves (e.g. lavender) to stroke, tickle, smell.
- Some participants find it easier to cope if you sit beside or behind them while participating in this activity.
- Reverse roles and encourage participants to dab oil on you and massage you instead.
- Enjoy the time together, even if it involves just lying side by side, relaxing or gently rocking together.
- Once a connection is made, extend to gentle massage of hands and feet. It is useful to have some baby-wipes handy for clearing any mess.
- Looking after someone more vulnerable than yourself can be very therapeutic. For this life-like baby dolls were introduced with surprisingly successful responses.
- Soft furry animal puppets can also calm and relax many participants

Links

Cloths (Prop)

Puppet (Prop)

Workshops: Buddhist Monk, Secret Garden, Woman in Bath, Stork

Videos

Lavender water

Buddhist Monk