

Activity cards

52 activities · two cards per page, cut on the dashed line

CARD	ACTIVITY	PEOPLE	TIME	TYPE
1	Alphabet Categories	3-25	10-20 min	Word and memory
2	Finish the Saying	3-30	10-20 min	Word and memory
3	Words from a Word	2-25	15-25 min	Word and memory
4	Pairs and Opposites	1:1 or up to 25	10-15 min	Word and memory
5	Twenty Questions	3-20	10-20 min	Word and memory
6	Group Word Scramble	2-25	10-20 min	Word and memory
7	Mirror Moves	1:1 or up to 40	5-15 min	Seated movement
8	Seated Parachute Waves	6-16	5-15 min	Seated movement
9	Parachute Ball Roll	6-16	10-15 min	Seated movement
10	Parachute Pass-Around	6-16	5-10 min	Seated movement
11	Seated Balloon Volley	2-20	10-20 min	Seated movement
12	Beanbag Target Toss	2-16	15-25 min	Seated movement
13	Seated Bowling	2-16	20-40 min	Seated movement
14	Ball Pass Categories	4-20	10-15 min	Seated movement
15	Chair Dancing	1:1 or up to 40	10-25 min	Seated movement
16	Large-Print Bingo	4+	30-60 min	Table and cards
17	Dominoes	2-4	20-40 min	Table and cards
18	Pig	2-8	15-30 min	Table and cards
19	Ship, Captain and Crew	2-8	15-30 min	Table and cards
20	Matching Pairs	1:1 or up to 4	10-20 min	Table and cards
21	Crazy Eights	2-5	15-30 min	Table and cards
22	Higher or Lower	1:1 or up to 30	10-20 min	Table and cards
23	Theme Talk	1:1 or up to 10	20-45 min	Reminiscence
24	Picture Talk	1:1 or up to 10	15-30 min	Reminiscence
25	Mystery Object	1:1 or up to 20	15-30 min	Reminiscence
26	This or That	1:1 or up to 30	10-20 min	Reminiscence
27	Places I've Been	1:1 or up to 12	20-40 min	Reminiscence
28	Morning Paper Chat	2-15	20-40 min	Reminiscence
29	Ask the Experts	3-20	20-40 min	Reminiscence
30	Towel and Laundry Folding	1:1 or up to 6	10-30 min	Sensory and hands-on
31	Sorting Tray	1:1 or up to 6	10-20 min	Sensory and hands-on
32	Rummage Box	1:1 or up to 3	10-30 min	Sensory and hands-on
33	Scent Jars	1:1 or up to 10	10-20 min	Sensory and hands-on
34	Texture Basket	1:1 or up to 4	5-15 min	Sensory and hands-on
35	Music Listening Time	1:1 or up to 15	10-30 min	Sensory and hands-on
36	Hand Care Visit	one-to-one	5-15 min	Sensory and hands-on
37	Potting Herbs	1:1 or up to 10	20-45 min	Sensory and hands-on
38	Old Songs Sing-Along	2+	15-45 min	Music, art, cooking
39	Group Poem	3-15	20-40 min	Music, art, cooking
40	Magazine Collage	1:1 or up to 12	30-60 min	Music, art, cooking
41	Watercolor Wash Painting	1:1 or up to 10	20-45 min	Music, art, cooking
42	Holiday Card Workshop	1:1 or up to 15	30-60 min	Music, art, cooking
43	No-Bake Fruit Parfaits	1:1 or up to 12	20-40 min	Music, art, cooking
44	Rhythm Circle	3-20	15-30 min	Music, art, cooking
45	Radio Play Reading	3-12	30-60 min	Music, art, cooking
46	Team Trivia	6+	30-60 min	Large-group events
47	Dice Horse Race	6+	30-60 min	Large-group events
48	One-Minute Challenge Afternoon	6+	45-75 min	Large-group events
49	Theme Day	6+	60-180 min	Large-group events
50	Leisure Discussion Group	3-12	30-45 min	Large-group events
51	Joke and Riddle Circle	3-30	15-30 min	Large-group events
52	Hobby Show and Tell	4+	30-60 min	Large-group events

Alphabet Categories

also: A to Z, Alphabet Game

3-25 people · 10-20 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

The group picks a category, such as flowers or things in a kitchen, and works through the alphabet together, one letter at a time.

YOU NEED

Whiteboard or large pad, thick marker

SETUP

Write the alphabet down the left side of a whiteboard in big letters. Seat everyone in a half circle facing the board, with anyone who has low vision or hearing in the front row.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Ask the group to choose a category. Good starters: foods, cities, girls' names, boys' names, things you find in a garage.
2. Start at A. Anyone can call out an answer; the leader writes the first one next to the letter.
3. Move to B, then C. If a letter stumps the room, give a hint or skip it and come back later.
4. Accept close calls generously. If someone says "quilt" for Q in a kitchen category, ask them where it lives and write it down.
5. When you reach Z, read the whole list back to the group.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Never go around the circle demanding an answer from each person. Calling out is voluntary.

- Let people who prefer to watch simply watch; reading the list aloud still includes them.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: use a black marker on a white board, letters at least three inches tall, and read each answer aloud as you write it.
- Hearing: repeat every answer clearly before you write it, facing the group.
- Memory: pick categories tied to long-held knowledge, like foods or first names, rather than recent topics.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Skip Q, X and Z without comment if the group is tiring. Nobody misses them.
- Keep the finished boards and post one on the bulletin board with the date and category.

VARIATIONS

- Reverse it: give a letter and see how many categories the group can fill with it.
- Split into two tables and compare lists at the end.

Finish the Saying

also: Complete the Proverb, Old Sayings

3-30 people · 10-20 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

The leader reads the first half of a familiar saying and the group calls out the ending, then talks about what it means.

YOU NEED

A list of 30 to 40 common sayings, written by the leader

SETUP

Before the session, write out 30 to 40 everyday sayings and proverbs on cards, with the first half on the front. Stick to sayings that were common in the US for generations, like "an apple a day" or "the early bird."

HOW TO PLAY

1. Read the first half slowly and clearly, for example "A penny saved..." and pause.
2. Let the group call out the ending together. Repeat the full saying once it's said.
3. Every few sayings, ask an open question: "Who used to say that in your house?" or "Is that true?"
4. Mix in a few that people may finish differently, and enjoy the different versions.
5. Stop while energy is still good, usually after 20 or so sayings.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Treat every ending as fine. If someone gives a funny or mixed-up version, laugh with them and say the common one as an aside.

- Avoid sayings about age, illness or death.

ADAPT IT

- Hearing: hold up the card with the first half printed in large letters as you read it.
- Memory: well-worn sayings often stay familiar long after newer facts fade, so this one tends to work into moderate impairment.
- Later-stage: a few sayings during a one-to-one visit can open a short chat, with no expectation of an answer.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Read the first half, then pause long enough for the slowest voice in the room to join in.
- Sayings with a story behind them ("mind your p's and q's") make a good talking point.

VARIATIONS

- Weather sayings only, such as "red sky at night."
- Ask the group to share a saying from their own family or trade that nobody else knows.

Words from a Word

also: Hidden Words, Little Words

2-25 people · 15-25 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

The leader writes one long word, and the group finds as many shorter words as they can make from its letters.

YOU NEED

Whiteboard or large pad, markers, optional large-print paper and pencils

SETUP

Pick a long word tied to the season or a theme, such as THANKSGIVING, WATERMELON or GRANDFATHER CLOCK. Write it across the top of the board in capitals.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Explain the rule: each new word can only use letters from the big word, and only as many times as they appear.
2. Call out words as a group. The leader writes each one under the big word.
3. Set a gentle goal, like 20 words, and count them up as you go.
4. When the group slows down, point to a letter and ask for words that start with it.
5. Finish by reading the list and pointing out the longest word found.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Keep it a group effort. Avoid scoring individuals, which can turn it into a test.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: write the long word with a space between each letter.
- Hands: no writing is needed from players; the leader does it all.
- Memory: keep the long word visible the whole time so nobody has to hold it in mind.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Have a list of 30 or so possible words ready beforehand so you can offer hints.
- Two-letter and three-letter words count. They keep everyone in the game.

VARIATIONS

- Independent groups can play in pairs with paper and compare lists.

Pairs and Opposites

also: Things That Go Together

1:1 or up to 25 · 10-15 min · fully seated · calm · levels: mild to moderate

The leader says one half of a familiar pair, like "salt and," or a word like "hot," and the group answers with its partner or opposite.

YOU NEED

A list of 30 pairs, written by the leader

SETUP

Write two lists: everyday pairs (salt and pepper, bread and butter, needle and thread, hammer and nails) and simple opposites (up and down, early and late). Mix them on one sheet.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Explain with an example or two: "If I say cup, you might say saucer."
2. Read the first word of each pair and let the group answer together.
3. Any reasonable answer counts. "Cup and coffee" is as good as "cup and saucer."
4. Every so often, ask a follow-up: "Who used a needle and thread a lot?"

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Keep the pace slow and warm. Silence is fine; give the answer yourself and move on.

ADAPT IT

- Memory: this suits groups where open-ended questions are too hard, since the first word does much of the work.
- Hearing: show the first word on a card as you say it.
- Later-stage: five or six very familiar pairs (salt and pepper, bread and butter) at a bedside can make a short, easy chat.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Pairs from work and home life (lock and key, pots and pans, nuts and bolts) reach a wider range of people.
- End on an easy one so the last answer is a success.

VARIATIONS

- Rhymes: say a word and the group offers a word that rhymes.

Twenty Questions

also: Animal, Vegetable or Mineral

3-20 people · 10-20 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

One person thinks of an object, and the group asks yes-or-no questions to work out what it is, with up to 20 questions.

YOU NEED

Slips of paper with object names, optional

SETUP

Seat the group in a circle or half circle. The leader goes first to show how it works. Keep a tally of questions on the board.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The chooser says whether the object is an animal, a plant or a thing.
2. Group members ask yes-or-no questions, such as "Is it bigger than a breadbox?"
3. The chooser answers only yes or no. The leader marks each question on the board.
4. Anyone can guess at any point. If 20 questions pass, the chooser reveals the answer.
5. Whoever guesses can choose next, or pass the turn to the leader.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Nobody has to take a turn as chooser. Offer the slips so choosing is easy.

ADAPT IT

- Memory: write the yes answers on the board as clues so nobody has to remember them.
- Hearing: the leader repeats each question loudly before the chooser answers.
- Hands: the chooser can be handed a slip with an object written on it instead of thinking one up.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Household objects from 50 years ago (washboard, rotary phone, milk bottle) make lively rounds.
- If the group stalls, the leader can offer a free clue.

Group Word Scramble

also: Jumbled Words

2-25 people · 10-20 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

The leader writes a word with its letters mixed up, and the group works together to unscramble it, with a theme as a hint.

YOU NEED

Whiteboard or large cards, markers

SETUP

Choose 10 to 15 words on one theme, such as garden flowers or kitchen tools. Write each scrambled word on a large card, or on the board one at a time.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Tell the group the theme first. It's the biggest hint.
2. Show the first scrambled word and read the letters aloud.
3. Let the group call out guesses. If it's slow going, reveal the first letter, then the second.
4. Write the answer under the scramble once someone gets it, and move to the next.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Never leave a word hanging until the room feels stuck. Reveal and move on.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: use cards with one large letter each so you can move letters around on a ledge or table.
- Memory: shorter words of four or five letters keep it within reach.
- Hands: the leader handles all the writing.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Check every scramble before the session; it's easy to make one that spells a second word.
- Mix one or two easy words in early so the group gets a quick win.

Mirror Moves

also: Follow the Leader Warm-Up, Seated Stretch

1:1 or up to 40 · 5-15 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to later-stage

A seated warm-up where the leader faces the group and everyone copies slow, simple movements, like rolling shoulders or tapping toes.

YOU NEED

Optional music player

SETUP

Arrange chairs in a half circle so everyone can see the leader. Check that wheelchairs have brakes on. Play quiet music if you like.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Sit facing the group at their level. Start with a deep breath in and out together.
2. Move slowly from top to bottom: nod yes, shake no, roll shoulders, reach forward, open and close hands, march feet, circle ankles.
3. Do each move about 8 times, counting aloud.
4. After a few rounds, invite a volunteer to lead a move of their own.
5. End with a stretch forward and a long breath out.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Check care plans for shoulder, hip and neck limits. Keep reaching below shoulder height for anyone with shoulder restrictions.
- Avoid fast head turns and neck circles; a slow nod and turn are enough.
- Watch for breathlessness and let anyone rest at any time.

ADAPT IT

- Mobility: every move has a smaller version. Say so aloud: "Do as much as feels good."
- Hearing: since it's visual, it works well with hearing loss; keep your moves big and clear.
- Later-stage: mirroring often works without verbal instructions; sit close and face the person, one-to-one.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Use everyday motions people know: stirring a pot, pulling a rope, rowing a boat, kneading dough.
- This makes a good opener for any group session in this library.

Seated Parachute Waves

also: Parachute Ripples

6-16 people · 5-15 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to later-stage

Seated in a circle, everyone holds the edge of a parachute and makes small ripples, then big waves, together.

YOU NEED

Play parachute, 6 to 12 feet across, with handles

SETUP

Set chairs and wheelchairs in a tight circle, close enough that the parachute is slightly slack when everyone holds an edge. Brakes on, armrests where possible. A 6 to 12 foot parachute suits most seated circles.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Hand out the edge so each person has a handle or a fold of fabric. Staff fill any gaps.
2. Start with tiny ripples: shake gently, like shaking out a tablecloth.
3. Build to slow waves: everyone lifts to chest height, then lowers to lap height, together.
4. Call out weather: "light breeze" (small ripples), "storm" (bigger shakes), "calm sea" (still).
5. End with everyone lifting together, letting the parachute float down onto laps.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Older skin tears easily. Avoid quick yanks, and check that no one has fabric wrapped around fingers or wrists.
- Keep lifts below shoulder height for anyone with shoulder limits.
- Let anyone hand off their section and watch. Some people find the moving fabric startling at first.

ADAPT IT

- Hands: someone with a weak grip can rest hands on the fabric instead of gripping.
- Later-stage: the color and moving air are the point; keep it to a few minutes of gentle waves.
- Mobility: lift to shoulder height at most.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Hum or play a waltz-time song and wave on the beat.
- Ask the group to describe the colors as they move; it adds talk without effort.

Parachute Ball Roll

also: Ball on the Parachute

6-16 people · 10-15 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to moderate

The seated group tilts the parachute to roll a soft ball around the edge, keep it from falling off, or steer it into the center hole.

YOU NEED

Play parachute with a center hole, one or two soft lightweight balls

SETUP

Same seated circle as parachute waves, brakes on. Use a soft ball about the size of a cantaloupe.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Put the ball on the parachute and ask the group to keep it from falling off.
2. Next, try to roll it all the way around the edge: each person lowers their side as the ball comes toward them.
3. Then try to sink it in the center hole. Count how many tries it takes.
4. Add a second ball once the group has the hang of it.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Use a light, soft ball only. A heavy ball can strike a face when it bounces.

- Avoid fast lifts; skin and shoulders come first.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: use a brightly colored ball that contrasts with the parachute.
- Hands: the ball steers fine even if a few people simply hold the fabric still.
- Memory: give one instruction at a time and show it before saying it.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Cheer for the group's best streak, not for any one person.
- If the ball keeps flying off, the parachute is too taut. Move chairs in a little.

Parachute Pass-Around

also: Merry-Go-Round, Parachute Turn

6-16 people · 5-10 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to moderate

The seated group passes the parachute edge hand over hand so the whole chute turns slowly like a merry-go-round.

YOU NEED

Play parachute

SETUP

Seated circle with brakes on. Mark one spot on the parachute, like a bright color panel, so the group can watch it travel.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Everyone holds the edge with both hands.
2. On "pass," each person slides the fabric to their right, hand over hand, at a slow pace.
3. Watch the marked panel travel around the circle. When it comes back, cheer.
4. Reverse direction and pass to the left.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Pass slowly. Fabric pulled quickly can burn or tear thin skin.
- Make sure no one's rings, bracelets or sleeves catch.

ADAPT IT

- Hands: people with arthritis can push the fabric along with flat palms instead of gripping.
- Memory: the leader says "right" and points each time.
- Mobility: keep the fabric at lap height so no reaching is needed.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Sing a simple counting song or play music and stop when the music stops.
- Ask the person sitting under the marked panel when the music stops to name a favorite color, or to pass.

Seated Balloon Volley

also: Balloon Volleyball, Balloon Tap

2-20 people · 10-20 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to moderate

Seated players tap a balloon back and forth across the circle, or across a low string net, and try to keep it from touching the floor.

YOU NEED

Latex-free balloons, optional foam pool noodles cut in half, optional string or yarn for a net line

SETUP

Seat players in a circle, or in two facing rows about six feet apart with a string tied between two chairs at knee height as the net. Brakes on.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Toss a balloon into the middle.
2. Players tap it with hands or a half noodle to keep it up. Count taps out loud as a group.
3. If it lands, start the count again. Try to beat the best count.
4. For the two-row version, tap it over the string. A point goes to a side when the balloon lands on the other team's floor.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Many balloons are latex. Check for latex allergies and use latex-free balloons.

- Staff, not players, retrieve balloons from the floor. Leaning out of a chair to reach is a fall risk.
- Pop and remove any burst balloon pieces right away; they're a choking hazard.

ADAPT IT

- Mobility: pool noodles extend reach, so nobody has to lean far out of a chair.
- Vision: use bright balloons and only one at a time.
- Hands: hitting with a palm or a noodle needs no grip.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- A balloon with a jingle bell inside (tie it in before inflating) is easier to follow for people with low vision.
- Keep a spare balloon blown up, since pops will startle people. Warn the group that it may happen.

VARIATIONS

- Call a name before tapping it to that person.

Beanbag Target Toss

also: Beanbag Toss, Bucket Toss

2-16 people · 15-25 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to moderate

Seated players take turns tossing beanbags into a basket or onto a numbered target and add up points.

YOU NEED

6 to 10 beanbags, a laundry basket or bucket, or a target mat with numbered rings, scoreboard

SETUP

Place the basket or target about four to six feet from the throwing chair. Seat others in a half circle so they can watch. Mark three distances so each person can choose one.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Each player gets three beanbags per turn.
2. Toss underhand toward the target. A beanbag in the basket scores 2; one touching the basket scores 1.
3. A staff member or volunteer collects the beanbags and hands them to the next player.
4. Keep a team score on the board rather than individual scores.
5. Play three or four rounds.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Beanbags filled with dried beans or corn can be a problem for anyone who might put one in their mouth; use plastic-pellet beanbags with sewn seams for memory care.

- Players never bend to pick up beanbags from the floor. Staff hand them back.

ADAPT IT

- Mobility: let each player choose their distance; points stay the same.
- Vision: a bright basket against a plain floor is easier to see. Tap the basket to give a sound cue.
- Hands: smaller beanbags suit weak grips; heavier ones suit tremor.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Put the score on the board in big numbers and add it up together.
- A seasonal target (a pumpkin-colored basket, a snowman cutout) ties the game to the calendar.

VARIATIONS

- Tic-tac-toe: tape a big grid on the floor and play two teams, X and O.

Seated Bowling

also: Hallway Bowling, Chair Bowling

2-16 people · 20-40 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to moderate

Players roll a light ball from their chair toward ten plastic pins, with two rolls a turn and a group scoreboard.

YOU NEED

Lightweight plastic pins or 10 empty plastic bottles, a soft playground ball or plastic bowling ball, scoreboard, optional bowling ramp

SETUP

Set up the pins in a triangle eight to twelve feet from the bowling chair, in a hallway or along the side of the room. Seat a volunteer at the pins to reset them. Lay out the scoreboard with large print.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The bowler sits in the bowling chair, brakes on, facing the pins.
2. Roll the ball with one or two hands from the side of the chair or between the knees.
3. Count pins knocked down, then give a second roll.
4. A volunteer resets the pins and returns the ball to the next bowler's hands.
5. Play five frames and add scores as a team.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Bowlers stay seated. Bending to release the ball should stay within a comfortable range; offer the ramp first.
- Clear the lane of walkers and feet, and seat watchers well to the side.

ADAPT IT

- Mobility: a bowling ramp lets someone with limited arm movement aim and give a push.
- Vision: stand behind the pins and call out so the bowler can aim toward your voice.
- Hands: a light playground ball works for anyone who can't hold a heavier ball.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Fill the bottles with an inch of water or sand so they don't fall at a breath.
- Running a weekly league with team names on the board gives people something to come back for.

Ball Pass Categories

also: Hot Potato Categories, Name It and Pass It

4-20 people · 10-15 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to moderate

The group passes or gently tosses a soft ball around a seated circle, and whoever catches it names something in a category, or passes.

YOU NEED

A soft ball about the size of a cantaloupe

SETUP

Seat everyone in a circle close enough to hand the ball over or toss it underhand a short way. Choose a category, such as fruits or states.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The leader names the category and passes the ball to the first person.
2. That person names one item, or says "pass," then hands or tosses the ball to someone else.
3. When the category runs dry, the next person picks a new one.
4. Speed up a bit as the group warms up, or switch to handing the ball only.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Say each person's name before you toss so nobody is caught off guard.

ADAPT IT

- Mobility: handing the ball to the neighbor works as well as tossing.
- Memory: use easy categories like colors or foods; "pass" is always a fine answer.
- Hands: a soft knobby ball or a beanbag is easier to catch and hold.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Help out quietly by offering two choices: "Apple or banana?"
- Play without categories at first, just passing to music, then add them.

Chair Dancing

also: Seated Dance, Sit-Down Dance Party

1:1 or up to 40 · 10-25 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to later-stage

Seated dancing to music people know, with simple arm, hand and foot moves that change with each song.

YOU NEED

Music player and speaker, optional scarves or ribbons, optional shakers

SETUP

Pick five or six songs with different tempos, such as a march, a waltz and a swing number. Seat everyone where they can see the leader. Hand out scarves if using them.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Start with a slow song: sway side to side and wave a scarf.
2. Move to a march: march the feet, swing the arms.
3. Try a waltz: sway in threes, sweep the arms in big circles.
4. Go back to a slower song and let the movement wind down.
5. End with a stretch and a sip of water.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Keep water nearby and offer it between songs.

- Lower the volume if the room is small; loud music in a hard room can be upsetting.
- Nobody needs to stand. If someone wants to dance standing, staff stay close and the floor is clear.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: scarves and familiar music give a person something to watch and hold; keep songs short and staff close by.
- Mobility: hands-only or feet-only dancing is still dancing.
- Hearing: turn the bass up and keep moves visible so people can follow the beat with their eyes.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Ask the group for requests and write them down for next time.
- Songs from the years when most of the group were teens and young adults tend to get the most response.

TABLE AND CARDS

Large-Print Bingo

also: Bingo, Lotto

4+ people · 30-60 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

Classic number bingo with large-print cards and a slow, clear caller, played for small prizes or the honor of winning.

YOU NEED

Large-print bingo cards, chips or slide-shutter cards, a cage or bag of numbered balls, small prizes

SETUP

Use cards with numbers at least an inch tall and high contrast. Slide-shutter cards (the windows close over each number) suit shaky hands. Seat the caller where everyone can see their face, and put a whiteboard behind them.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Explain the pattern for this game: a line, four corners or a full card.
2. Call each number twice, slowly: "B, seven. B, seven." Write it on the whiteboard as you call.
3. Give a long pause, then move on. Watch the room and slow down if people are still looking.
4. When someone calls "Bingo," read the card back against the board.
5. Play several short games rather than one long blackout.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Use chips no smaller than a quarter, and skip small candy as markers for anyone who might eat them.

- Some residents may treat prizes as a big deal. Keep them small and plentiful, and play for points, not money.

ADAPT IT

- Hearing: say the letter and number apart, and add a clue that can't be misheard: "N, thirty-one. That's three, one."
- Vision: write every called number on the board in thick marker and leave them all up.
- Memory: a helper sits at each table to check cards quietly and help mark numbers.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Numbers that sound alike (fifteen and fifty, thirteen and thirty) cause most mistakes. Say the digits.
- Theme bingo with pictures or words, such as garden flowers, works for groups who find numbers hard.

VARIATIONS

- Picture bingo with photos of objects, or word bingo with old sayings.

Dominoes

also: Block Dominoes, Draw Dominoes

2-4 people · 20-40 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

Players take turns matching the ends of dominoes in a line; the first to play all their tiles wins the hand.

YOU NEED

A set of dominoes, ideally jumbo or large-dot

SETUP

Use a double-six set. Turn all tiles face down and shuffle them on the table. Each player draws seven tiles (five if four people play).

HOW TO PLAY

1. The player with the highest double starts by placing it in the middle.
2. Moving clockwise, each player places a tile so that one end matches an open end of the line.
3. If you can't play, draw from the pile until you can, or pass if the pile is empty.
4. The first player out of tiles wins the hand. If everyone is stuck, the lowest total of dots wins.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Jumbo dominoes are safer for anyone who might put things in their mouth.
- Let people play at their own pace. A slow player is not holding up the game.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: jumbo dominoes with colored dots let players match by color as well as count.
- Memory: play with tiles face up and work the line together as a team.
- Hands: a domino rack or a book stand keeps tiles upright without holding them.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Some people know dominoes from their own family or neighborhood and play by house rules. Let them teach their version.
- For a quiet small group, two players and a staff member make a good afternoon table.

Pig

also: Hold or Roll

2-8 people · 15-30 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

Players roll one die as many times as they dare, adding up points, but a roll of 1 wipes out the turn's total.

YOU NEED

One large die, paper and pen or a whiteboard for scores, a dice tray or shallow box

SETUP

Seat players around a table with a dice tray in the middle. Draw a score column for each player on the board.

HOW TO PLAY

1. On your turn, roll the die and add the number to your running total for that turn.
2. Keep rolling or say "hold." Holding banks your turn total.
3. If you roll a 1, you lose that turn's points and the die passes on.
4. First to 100 points wins. For a shorter game, play to 50.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Keep the mood light. A 1 should get a groan and a laugh, never a dig at the player.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: use a big die with dots, not numerals, in high contrast.
- Hands: roll the die from a cup into the tray, or have a helper roll while the player decides.
- Memory: the scorekeeper says the running total aloud after every roll.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- The decision to stop or keep going is where the fun is. Ask the table for advice to get everyone talking.
- A dice tray stops dice rolling off the table and saves trips to the floor.

Ship, Captain and Crew

also: Six, Five, Four

2-8 people · 15-30 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

A traditional dice game where each player gets three rolls to find a 6 (the ship), a 5 (the captain) and a 4 (the crew), then scores the other two dice.

YOU NEED

Five dice, a cup, a dice tray, paper and pen for scores

SETUP

Seat players around a table with the tray in the middle. Write the order on a card: 6 first, then 5, then 4.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Roll all five dice. If there's a 6, set it aside.
2. Once you have a 6, set aside a 5; once you have a 5, set aside a 4. They must come in that order.
3. You get three rolls in total. If you have the 6, 5 and 4, the other two dice are your cargo; add them up for your score.
4. If you don't get all three, you score zero for that turn.
5. Highest cargo after an agreed number of rounds wins.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Play for points, not money or snacks, so nobody feels pressured.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: large dice and a light-colored tray.
- Memory: put the reference card with 6, 5, 4 in front of each player.
- Hands: roll from a cup, or let a partner roll.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Teach it with all dice face up and a slow first round.
- Say the needed number aloud each roll: "Still looking for the ship, a six."

Matching Pairs

also: Memory Card Game, Pairs

1:1 or up to 4 · 10-20 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

Picture cards in pairs are laid out face down, and players turn two over at a time looking for a match.

YOU NEED

A set of large picture cards in matching pairs, adult themes such as flowers, birds or classic cars

SETUP

Pick 6 to 12 pairs. Lay the cards in a neat grid face down. For people with moderate impairment, start face up (see Memory below).

HOW TO PLAY

1. Players take turns turning over two cards.
2. If they match, the player keeps them and goes again.
3. If not, turn them back over in the same spot and pass the turn.
4. Play until all pairs are found. Count pairs, or just enjoy finishing as a group.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Use adult picture sets, not cartoon cards made for children.

- If face-down play is frustrating someone, switch to face up without comment.

ADAPT IT

- Memory: play face up as a matching task: find the two birds that match. It's the same cards, without the hide-and-seek.
- Vision: use cards with one large, clear photo each, not busy illustrations.
- Hands: lay cards on a nonslip mat so they turn over easily.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Talk about the pictures as you go: "Which of these birds comes to your feeder?"
- Start small with six pairs. You can always add more.

Crazy Eights

also: Switch, Eights

2-5 people · 15-30 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

Players match the top card of the discard pile by number or suit, and eights are wild; the first to play all their cards wins.

YOU NEED

A deck of large-print playing cards, card holders for anyone who needs them

SETUP

Deal five cards each (seven for two players). Put the rest face down as a draw pile and turn the top card up to start the discard pile.

HOW TO PLAY

1. On your turn, play a card that matches the top card's number or suit.
2. An eight can be played any time; the player who plays it names the next suit.
3. If you can't play, draw one card. Play it if you can; otherwise the turn passes.
4. First player with no cards left wins the hand.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Keep it social. If someone forgets a rule, the table helps without pointing it out.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: large-print or jumbo-index cards, and a plain tablecloth so cards stand out.
- Hands: a card holder or a shoebox lid with a slot keeps a hand of cards upright.
- Memory: play with hands face up and help each other find matches.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Many people already know a card game like rummy or gin. Ask the group what they played and run that game if there's interest.
- Post the rules on a large card in the middle of the table.

Higher or Lower

also: Hi-Lo

1:1 or up to 30 · 10-20 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

The leader shows a playing card, and the group guesses whether the next card will be higher or lower.

YOU NEED

A deck of jumbo playing cards, an easel or ledge to stand cards on

SETUP

Use jumbo cards and stand them on an easel or tray where everyone can see. Decide whether aces are high or low and say so.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Turn over the first card and name it aloud.
2. Ask the group: higher or lower? Take a show of hands or let people call out.
3. Turn over the next card. Count how many in a row the room gets right.
4. Keep going until the streak breaks, then start a new streak.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Keep it a group guess with no individual scoring, so a wrong guess costs nobody anything.

ADAPT IT

- Memory: there's no memory load; each guess starts fresh.
- Vision: jumbo cards on a dark background, read aloud every time.
- Hearing: point up or down with your thumb as you say "higher" or "lower."

FACILITATOR TIPS

- A middle card like a 7 gets the best debate. Let people argue for their side.
- Try a reward streak: five right in a row earns a song or a story.

Theme Talk

also: Reminiscence Group, Memory Lane Circle

1:1 or up to 10 · 20-45 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

A small group talks about one theme, like first jobs or kitchens, guided by open questions and a few objects to pass around.

YOU NEED

A question list from the reminiscence themes below, optional photos or objects on the theme

SETUP

Pick one theme from the reminiscence list at the end of this library. Gather two or three objects or photos to pass around. Seat six to ten people in a close circle, in a quiet room with the TV off.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Introduce the theme and pass around the first object.
2. Ask one open question and wait. Let silence sit for a few seconds.
3. Follow each answer with a small follow-up: "What did it smell like?" or "Who else was there?"
4. Invite quieter people by name, gently, and accept a pass.
5. Close by thanking people for what they shared and saying a little of what you heard.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Some topics bring up loss. If someone becomes upset, acknowledge it kindly, stay with them, and let staff know after.
- Never correct a story's details. The person's version is the right one here.
- Use the neutral wording in the question lists so no one is left out by assumptions about family, marriage or faith.

ADAPT IT

- Hearing: keep the group small, sit close, and repeat each person's answer for the room.
- Memory: objects and photos do a lot of the work. A person who can't find words may still hold and show.
- Later-stage: do it one-to-one with a single object and short, simple questions.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Write down a few details people share, with permission, and bring them back next week.
- Six questions are plenty for one session. Let a good answer run.

Picture Talk

also: Photo Prompts, Picture Conversation

1:1 or up to 10 · 15-30 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

The group looks at one large photo at a time and talks about what they see and what it brings to mind.

YOU NEED

Large printed photos or a picture book of scenes: markets, beaches, farms, dance halls, old cars

SETUP

Choose eight to ten clear, large photos with plenty going on. Print at letter size or larger. Library picture books of past decades work well.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Hold up the first picture or pass it around.
2. Ask, "What's going on here?" and let people describe it.
3. Follow with a personal question: "Have you been somewhere like this?"
4. Move on when the talk winds down; there's no need to finish every picture.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Choose pictures with care. Avoid war, disaster or hospital scenes unless the group asks for them.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: photos with strong contrast and one clear subject; describe the picture aloud as you show it.
- Memory: describing what's in front of you needs no recall, so everyone can take part.
- Later-stage: one bright photo of a familiar scene, like a garden or a dog, held close during a visit.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Pictures with a small puzzle ("What year do you think this is?") get guesses going.
- Ask a family member for a photo from someone's own life to use one-to-one.

Mystery Object

also: What Is It?, Old Gadgets

1:1 or up to 20 · 15-30 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

The leader brings out an old-fashioned object, passes it around, and the group works out what it is and talks about using it.

YOU NEED

4 to 8 older household or work tools, such as a darning egg, an egg beater, a clothes pin, a butter churn paddle, a shoe stretcher

SETUP

Gather a few older tools from a thrift store, a staff member's basement or a local historical society. Keep them in a bag or box so each one is a reveal.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Take out one object and pass it around.
2. Ask, "What could this be?" Let guesses come.
3. Once the group knows it (and someone often does), ask who used one and what for.
4. Move on to the next object.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- No sharp tools or blades. Check for sharp edges, and keep small parts away from anyone who might mouth them.

- Clean objects before and after.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: feel and weight carry much of the fun; describe the object as it's passed.
- Hands: hold the object out for someone to touch instead of passing it.
- Memory: objects from early adult life are often more familiar than recent gadgets.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Residents who grew up on farms or worked in trades often turn out to be the experts. Give them the floor.
- Bring a few modern objects too and ask the group to explain them.

This or That

also: Would You Rather, Two Choices

1:1 or up to 30 · 10-20 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

The leader asks easy two-choice questions, like coffee or tea, and the room picks a side and says why.

YOU NEED

A list of 20 to 30 two-choice questions, written by the leader

SETUP

Write a list of paired choices: beach or mountains, pie or cake, morning or evening, dogs or cats, front porch or back porch. Have a few "why" follow-ups ready.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Ask the first question and take a show of hands for each side.
2. Ask one or two people on each side why they chose it.
3. Keep a light tally on the board if the group enjoys the competition.
4. Let people add their own pairs once they've got the idea.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Avoid politics and religion. Keep pairs light.

ADAPT IT

- Memory: two choices are easier than an open question; you can hold up two pictures to make it easier still.
- Hearing: write both choices on the board.
- Later-stage: two familiar objects held up side by side, like an apple and an orange, with "Which do you like?"

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Pairs with a strong local angle (two local sports teams, two diners in town) bring out opinions.

Places I've Been

also: Map Talk, Pins on the Map

1:1 or up to 12 · 20-40 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

Group members put a dot on a large map for places that matter to them, such as where they grew up, worked or always wanted to visit, then talk about them.

YOU NEED

A large wall map of the country or the world, colored sticky dots or map pins, markers

SETUP

Hang a big map at seated eye level, or lay it on a table. Use a different dot color for each kind of place: grew up, lived, visited, dream trip.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Explain the dot colors and put up a few of your own to show how it works.
2. Invite each person to add a dot or two, with help as needed.
3. Ask about each place: "What was it like there?" "What would you want to see?"
4. Leave the map up for a week and keep adding to it.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- "Dream trip" dots let everyone take part, including people who haven't traveled much.
- Pins are sharp. Use sticky dots in memory care.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: a large-print map, and the leader reads place names aloud.
- Mobility: lay the map on a table so nobody has to reach up a wall.
- Memory: help find places by talking about nearby cities or landmarks.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Write initials on dots, with permission, so people find each other: two residents from the same town have something to talk about.

Morning Paper Chat

also: Current Events Group, News and Views

2-15 people · 20-40 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

Over coffee, the leader reads a few short news items aloud, mostly local and light, and the group talks them over.

YOU NEED

Today's local newspaper or printed news stories, coffee or tea, if diets allow

SETUP

Choose four to six short stories: one local, one about weather, one human-interest, one about sports or the arts. Skip the harshest headlines unless the group wants them.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Read the first story aloud, slowly. Summarize long ones.
2. Ask, "What do you make of that?" and let opinions come.
3. Tie stories back to the group: "How did your town handle snowstorms?"
4. End with something light, like the weather or a funny item.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Expect strong opinions on some topics. Make room for disagreement and keep it courteous.

- Check thickened-liquid and diet orders before serving drinks.

ADAPT IT

- Hearing: hand out a large-print copy of each story.
- Vision: read everything aloud and describe photos.
- Memory: keep stories short and give each one a clear headline.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- A rotating "editor" from the group can pick one story to read each week.

Ask the Experts

also: Advice Panel, Wisdom Circle

3-20 people · 20-40 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

The group acts as an advice panel for practical questions, like getting a stain out or growing tomatoes, and the leader writes down their best answers.

YOU NEED

A list of practical questions written on cards

SETUP

Write 10 to 15 questions on cards: how to keep a pie crust flaky, how to save money on groceries, what to do on a first day at a new job, how to fix a squeaky hinge. Staff and students can add real questions of their own.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Read out a question and open the floor.
2. Write the advice on the board as it comes.
3. Ask follow-ups: "Where did you learn that?"
4. Gather the best tips into a typed sheet to share with families or post in the hall, with permission.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Take every answer seriously. The point is that this group knows things.

- Ask before printing anyone's name with their tip.

ADAPT IT

- Hearing: repeat each piece of advice before writing it.
- Memory: practical, long-held skills tend to be easier to talk about than recent events.
- Vision: read the question aloud twice.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Invite staff, volunteers or visiting students to bring a real question. It changes the room.

Towel and Laundry Folding

also: Folding Basket

1:1 or up to 6 · 10-30 min · fully seated · calm · levels: mild to later-stage

A purposeful task: folding a basket of warm, clean towels or napkins, done at the person's own pace and in their own way.

YOU NEED

A basket of clean hand towels, washcloths or napkins, a table

SETUP

Bring a basket of clean towels, still warm from the dryer if you can. Sit at a table beside the person, not across from them.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Invite help: "Could you give me a hand with these?"
2. Fold one yourself, slowly, so the person can watch.
3. Hand over a towel and let the person fold it however they like.
4. Stack the folded towels neatly and thank them for the help.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Never refold someone's towels in front of them. Their way is the right way.
- Use clean laundry only, and avoid items with small buttons or loose threads for anyone who mouths objects.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: smoothing a towel flat or holding a warm one is enough.
- Hands: washcloths and napkins are easier than bath towels for weak grips.
- Vision: use solid-color towels against a contrasting tablecloth.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Real tasks are more inviting than make-work. If the towels are actually used later, say so.
- Some people prefer matching socks or rolling yarn; keep a basket of each.

VARIATIONS

- Matching pairs of clean socks.
- Rolling a ball of yarn while the leader holds the skein.

Sorting Tray

also: Sorting Basket, Sort and Match

1:1 or up to 6 · 10-20 min · fully seated · calm · levels: mild to later-stage

Sorting a mixed basket of large, everyday items by color, shape or type into a divided tray.

YOU NEED

A muffin tin or divided tray, large items to sort: big plastic poker chips, fabric squares, plastic cutlery, large wooden spools, playing cards by suit

SETUP

Choose items that are large enough not to fit in a mouth and are pleasant to handle. Put them in a basket next to a divided tray.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Show how to sort one or two items: "The red ones go here."
2. Hand over the basket and let the person carry on.
3. Talk about the items as you go, but don't correct mistakes.
4. When the basket is empty, mix everything back up if they'd like to go again.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Choking: use items larger than a golf ball for anyone who may put things in their mouth. No buttons, beads or coins in memory care.
- Stay with the person throughout.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: sorting into just two groups, like light and dark, keeps it failure-free.
- Memory: for people with milder impairment, sorting playing cards by suit and then in number order adds a challenge.
- Vision: strong colors and contrasting tray compartments.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Tools from a person's past job make sorting more meaningful: nuts and large bolts for a mechanic, spools for a seamstress (checked for size).
- There's no wrong answer. If someone makes up their own system, follow it.

Rummage Box

also: Memory Box, Busy Box, Theme Box

1:1 or up to 3 · 10-30 min · fully seated · calm · levels: mild to later-stage

A box of themed items to look through, hold and talk about, ready for a quiet moment or a one-to-one visit.

YOU NEED

A sturdy box or drawer, themed items: gardening gloves, seed packets and a trowel; or a hat, scarf, handbag and compact; or a tape measure, sandpaper block and a padlock with key

SETUP

Build a few boxes around interests in the group: gardening, office work, sewing, fishing, baking, travel, sports. Personalize a box for one resident using their care plan and family input.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Set the box on the table or lap and open it together.
2. Let the person take things out in any order. Follow their lead.
3. Name each object and ask a gentle question: "What would you use this for?"
4. Put the items back together when finished.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- No sharp items, small parts, medicines, toiletries or anything that looks like food unless it's real and safe to eat.
- Check items after each use and wash or wipe them.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: one or two soft, safe items, like a scarf or a smooth wooden spoon, are enough.
- Vision: choose items that are good to touch, with different weights and textures.
- Memory: label the box on the outside so staff on any shift can offer it.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Rummage boxes can help during restless times of day. Keep one on each unit.
- Rotate items every few weeks so the box stays interesting.

Scent Jars

also: Smell and Tell, Aroma Guessing

1:1 or up to 10 · 10-20 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to later-stage

Small jars of familiar kitchen and garden scents are passed around to smell, guess and talk about.

YOU NEED

6 to 10 small jars with lids, cotton balls, scents: vanilla, cinnamon, coffee grounds, lemon peel, peppermint, fresh-cut grass, orange, pine

SETUP

Put each scent in a jar on a cotton ball or in a cloth bag. Cover jars with paper so contents can't be seen. Number the lids and keep an answer key.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Open one jar at a time and hold it a few inches from the person's nose.
2. Ask, "What does this smell like to you?"
3. Reveal the answer and ask where they've smelled it: a kitchen, a barn, a holiday.
4. Move through the jars at an easy pace.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Check for allergies, asthma and breathing problems before using scents. Skip strong essential oils and sprays.

- Keep jars out of reach between sessions, and use contents that are safe if tasted.
- Our sense of smell often fades with age. If someone can't smell a jar, move on lightly.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: one familiar scent, like coffee or lemon, offered one-to-one, with a simple "Do you like that?"
- Vision: no sight needed; it's a good fit for people with low vision.
- Memory: scent often brings a story with it; no right answer is required.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Seasonal sets work well: pumpkin spice and apple in fall, pine and peppermint in winter.
- Pair a scent with a photo: coffee with a picture of a diner counter.

Texture Basket

also: Touch and Feel, Fabric Squares

1:1 or up to 4 · 5-15 min · fully seated · calm · levels: moderate to later-stage

A basket of different textures to touch and talk about, designed for quiet one-to-one time or a very small group.

YOU NEED

A basket of fabric squares and textured items: velvet, corduroy, satin, burlap, fleece, a smooth stone, a pine cone, a wooden spoon

SETUP

Cut fabric squares about 8 inches across and hem or pink the edges. Add a few large natural items, cleaned. Keep the basket in a quiet room.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Offer one item at a time, placing it in the person's hand.
2. Name it: "This is velvet. It's soft." Ask, "How does it feel?"
3. Compare two textures: rough and smooth, cool and warm.
4. Let the person keep a favorite to hold for a while.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Everything must be too big to swallow. Check pine cones and stones for size and sharp points.
- Wash fabrics between people.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: holding one soft square may be the whole activity. That's a full session.
- Vision: rich colors help, but touch carries it.
- Hands: lay fabrics flat on the lap for people who can't grip.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- A fabric from someone's past, like a work shirt flannel or a dress satin, can mean more than any store-bought kit.

Music Listening Time

also: Music and Memories, Listening Session

1:1 or up to 15 · 10-30 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to later-stage

A quiet session of listening to familiar music, in a small group or one-to-one with headphones, with a little talk between songs.

YOU NEED

Music player and good speaker or headphones, a playlist of songs the person knows

SETUP

Ask families and the person themselves about favorite songs, singers and styles. Build a short playlist of six to ten songs. Pick a quiet room.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Introduce each song with its title and a sentence about it.
2. Play it all the way through. Let people tap, hum or sit quietly.
3. Between songs, ask an open question: "Where would you hear this?"
4. End with a calm song and lower the volume slowly.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Never leave someone alone with headphones on. Check that volume is moderate and that they can remove them.

- Watch for sadness; some songs carry heavy memories. Switch songs gently if needed.
- Respect taste. A person's own music is better than what the leader thinks they should like.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: one-to-one with headphones, staff watching for comfort. Short sessions of 10 to 15 minutes.
- Hearing: headphones can work better than room speakers; check hearing aid comfort.
- Memory: familiar songs from someone's young adult years tend to be the most recognized.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Keep each person's playlist written in their care plan so every shift can use it.
- Playing music is different from copying it. Use a licensed streaming service or recordings you own, and don't share copies.

Hand Care Visit

also: Hand Lotion and Chat, Hand Pampering

one-to-one · 5-15 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to later-stage

A one-to-one visit where the staff member or volunteer gently rubs lotion into the person's hands while chatting or listening to music.

YOU NEED

Unscented or lightly scented hand lotion approved for the person, a soft towel, optional warm damp washcloth

SETUP

Ask permission first, every time. Check the care plan for skin conditions, allergies and any lotion restrictions. Sit side by side.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Ask, "Would you like some lotion on your hands?" Accept a no.
2. Warm a small amount of lotion in your own hands.
3. Smooth it over the back of the hand, then the palm and fingers, with light pressure.
4. Talk about their hands: the work they've done, any rings, what they used to make.
5. Wrap the hands in the soft towel for a minute at the end.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Use light pressure only. Older skin bruises and tears easily; avoid any broken skin, sores or swelling.
- Follow your facility's policy on touch and on who may apply lotion. This is a comfort visit, not massage therapy.
- Stop right away if the person pulls away or seems uncomfortable.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: touch and a calm voice may be the whole conversation.
- Hearing: sit on the better-hearing side and keep your face in view.
- Vision: say what you're about to do before touching.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Pair with music listening for a calm late-afternoon visit.

Potting Herbs

also: Windowsill Garden, Planting Day

1:1 or up to 10 · 20-45 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

Seated at a covered table, the group plants herb seedlings in small pots to keep on a windowsill and tend in the weeks after.

YOU NEED

Small pots, potting soil, herb seedlings such as basil, mint, parsley, trays or newspapers, scoops, watering can, aprons or gloves

SETUP

Cover tables with newspaper or trays. Put soil in a big bowl in the middle of each table with scoops. Check that tables are at a height wheelchairs fit under.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Pass the seedlings around to smell and touch.
2. Scoop soil into each pot until it's about half full.
3. Set the seedling in, then add soil around it and press it down.
4. Water lightly and label each pot with the herb and the gardener's name.
5. Choose a sunny windowsill and set up a watering schedule.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Some potting mixes contain fertilizers or fine particles. Wear gloves if the care plan calls for it, wash hands after, and keep soil away from anyone who might eat it.
- Use plants that are safe if nibbled. Basil, mint and parsley are common kitchen herbs; skip ornamental plants with unknown toxicity.

ADAPT IT

- Hands: wide-handled scoops and a funnel help; gloves are optional.
- Memory: hand over one step at a time; staff can do the first scoop.
- Mobility: everything happens at the table; nobody kneels or bends to the ground.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Use the herbs later in a cooking group, or just snip and smell them.
- Watering becomes a daily job someone can own.

MUSIC, ART, COOKING

Old Songs Sing-Along

also: Sing-Along, Song Circle

2+ people · 15-45 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to later-stage

The group sings old favorites together from large-print song sheets, with a piano, guitar or recording to follow.

YOU NEED

Large-print song sheets of public-domain songs, piano, guitar or a recording

SETUP

Choose eight to twelve songs published before 1929 or traditional folk songs, so the words can be printed freely. Examples: "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" (1908), "Shine On, Harvest Moon" (1908), "By the Light of the Silvery Moon" (1909), "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" (1910), "In the Good Old Summer Time" (1902), "Daisy Bell" (1892), "Oh! Susanna" (1848) and "Home on the Range." Print words in 18-point type or larger, one song per page.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Start with a song most people know, to warm up voices.
2. Introduce each song with its title and the year it came out.
3. Sing the chorus twice so people who don't read the sheet can join in.
4. Mix fast and slow songs, and seasonal ones in season.
5. Close with a gentle favorite.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Pitch songs low. Many older voices can't reach the high notes of the original keys.
- Keep water nearby; singing dries the throat.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: familiar songs from early life are often still within reach. Sit close, sing simply, and accept humming or tapping.
- Vision: people who can't read the sheet can still sing choruses from memory.
- Hearing: keep accompaniment simple and not too loud, and sing a little slower.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- The words of pre-1929 songs are in the public domain in the US, but a modern songbook's arrangement or a recording may not be. Type the lyrics yourself from an old source.
- Write the song list on the board so people can call for the next one.

VARIATIONS

- Seasonal set: "Jingle Bells" (1857) and "Auld Lang Syne" (traditional) in December.

Group Poem

also: Shared Poem, Poetry Circle

3-15 people · 20-40 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

The leader asks open questions on a theme, writes down people's words, and shapes them into a poem the group reads aloud.

YOU NEED

Whiteboard or large pad, markers, optional object or photo as a prompt

SETUP

Pick a theme with lots of senses in it, such as rain, a kitchen in the morning, the first warm day of spring. Bring a prop if you have one, like a lemon or a raincoat.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Ask sense questions about the theme: "What does rain sound like? What does it smell like? Where were you when it rained?"
2. Write every answer exactly as said, with the speaker's initials if they like.
3. Read the answers back and arrange them into lines with the group's help.
4. Give the poem a title together.
5. Read the finished poem aloud, then type and post it with all the poets' names.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Keep people's exact words. Tidying them up takes away their ownership.
- Ask before posting anyone's name.

ADAPT IT

- Memory: sense questions about the present (this lemon, this rain) need no recall.
- Later-stage: one or two words from a person can be a line.
- Hearing: repeat each answer as you write it.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Poems don't need to rhyme. Say so at the start.
- Repeating one line, like "I remember rain," at the start of each verse gives the poem a shape.

VARIATIONS

- Acrostic poem: write the theme word down the board and fill a line for each letter.

Magazine Collage

also: Picture Collage, Theme Collage

1:1 or up to 12 · 30-60 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

Group members cut or tear pictures from magazines on a theme and glue them onto a board to make one big collage or small personal ones.

YOU NEED

Old magazines and catalogs, safety scissors or pre-cut pictures, glue sticks, poster board or heavy paper

SETUP

Choose a theme: gardens, dream vacations, favorite foods, the four seasons. Pre-cut a pile of pictures for anyone who can't use scissors. Cover the tables.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Show the theme and a few sample pictures.
2. Let people flip through magazines and pick pictures they like.
3. Cut, tear or choose from the pre-cut pile.
4. Arrange the pictures on the board before gluing.
5. Glue, then hang the collage and talk about the choices.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Watch glue sticks and paper scraps with anyone who might put things in their mouth.
- Pick adult magazines (gardening, cooking, travel) rather than children's materials.

ADAPT IT

- Hands: tearing works as well as cutting; spring-loaded scissors help weak grips.
- Memory: pre-cut pictures and one step at a time.
- Vision: large, bright pictures and magazines with less text.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- A group collage on one big board makes a strong hallway display.
- Ask each person to say one thing about a picture they chose.

Watercolor Wash Painting

also: Wet-on-Wet Painting, Color Wash

1:1 or up to 10 · 20-45 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to later-stage

Painters wet the paper, then drop and brush color onto it so the paint spreads and blends, with no drawing skill needed.

YOU NEED

Watercolor paper, watercolor paints or liquid watercolors, wide soft brushes, water cups with weighted bases, paper towels, aprons

SETUP

Tape paper to the table at the corners. Fill water cups half full. Set out three or four colors that look good mixed, like blue, purple and yellow.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Brush clean water over the whole paper.
2. Dip the brush in a color and touch it to the wet paper. Watch it spread.
3. Add a second color next to it and let them blend.
4. Keep going until the paper is full, or stop at any point.
5. When dry, the paintings can become cards, bookmarks or a framed set.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Use non-toxic paints, and keep water cups apart from drinking cups.
- Aprons protect clothing; people may care a lot about their clothes. Ask before putting one on.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: hand-over-hand only with permission; often a brush placed in the hand and a nudge of the cup is enough.
- Hands: wide foam brushes with thick handles are easier to hold.
- Vision: strong, saturated colors on white paper.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- There's no wrong result. Admire color choices, not accuracy.
- Sprinkle a pinch of salt on wet paint for a starry effect.

Holiday Card Workshop

also: Card Making, Greeting Cards

1:1 or up to 15 · 30-60 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

The group makes greeting cards for an upcoming holiday or occasion, to send to family, staff or a local organization.

YOU NEED

Folded card stock, stamps and ink pads, stickers, ribbon and pre-cut shapes, glue sticks, markers, envelopes

SETUP

Pre-fold cards and set out bins of materials by type. Have a few finished samples on the table. Decide who the cards are for, such as a local veterans' group or a children's hospital, or each person's own family.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Show the samples and the materials.
2. Each person picks a card and decorates the front.
3. Help with the message inside: offer a few short phrases on a board to copy.
4. Address envelopes or bundle cards for delivery.
5. Post a photo of the finished cards on the activity board.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Tie the occasion to the calendar without assuming everyone celebrates the same holidays. Offer neutral cards (thank you, thinking of you, happy season) as well.
- Small sequins and beads are choking risks; leave them out in memory care.

ADAPT IT

- Hands: rubber stamps with large handles, and peel-off stickers.
- Memory: one decoration at a time, with a finished sample to copy.
- Vision: thick black markers and high-contrast card stock.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Cards with a real recipient and a real mailbox give the work a purpose.
- Make the same session work for birthdays and get-well cards through the year.

No-Bake Fruit Parfaits

also: Yogurt Parfait Bar, Cooking Group

1:1 or up to 12 · 20-40 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

A simple cooking group where people layer yogurt or pudding with soft fruit in clear cups, then eat what they made.

YOU NEED

Clear cups, spoons, yogurt or pudding, soft fruit such as bananas, berries or canned peaches, optional crushed graham crackers or granola, aprons, hand-washing supplies, printed recipe card

SETUP

Check every participant's diet orders, food allergies and texture requirements before planning. Wash hands. Set out ingredients in bowls with serving spoons, and a large-print recipe card on each table.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Read the recipe card aloud together.
2. Slice soft fruit with a butter knife, or start with pre-cut fruit.
3. Spoon a layer of yogurt into the cup, then a layer of fruit.
4. Repeat until the cup is full, and top with a little crumble if diets allow.
5. Enjoy them together and talk about favorite desserts.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Diet orders come first. Check thickened-liquid orders, diabetes plans, allergies (nuts, dairy, gluten) and texture levels with the care team.

- Whole grapes, nuts and hard granola are choking risks. Cut fruit small and soft for anyone with swallowing concerns.
- Follow food-safety rules: wash hands, keep dairy cold, and eat within the session.

ADAPT IT

- Memory: give one step at a time, with the finished parfait as an example.
- Hands: wide-handled spoons and cups with a weighted base.
- Later-stage: tasting a spoonful of smooth yogurt and fruit that fits the diet order, and stirring a bowl, is a full session.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Smells and tastes from childhood kitchens get people talking. Ask about desserts they used to make.
- Write the recipe on a card people can take home or send to family.

VARIATIONS

- Seasonal swap: pumpkin pudding with spice in fall, berries in summer.

Rhythm Circle

also: Drum Circle, Rhythm Band

3-20 people · 15-30 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to later-stage

Seated players use simple percussion to keep time with music or follow the leader's rhythms, call and answer.

YOU NEED

Hand drums, shakers, tambourines, rhythm sticks, music player

SETUP

Pass out instruments, offering a choice. Sit in a circle so everyone can see the leader.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Start with a steady beat together: tap, tap, tap, tap.
2. The leader plays a short rhythm and the group copies it.
3. Play along to a march or a song with a strong beat.
4. Try loud and soft, fast and slow.
5. End with a big shared finish on the count of three.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Keep volume moderate. Loud drumming in a small room can overwhelm people.

- Egg shakers are small; use larger shakers with anyone who might put them in their mouth.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: a shaker placed in the hand; any movement makes sound and counts.
- Hands: shakers and egg shakers need little grip; drums can be played with a flat hand.
- Hearing: drums carry low tones people can feel.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Pass the lead around: anyone can play a rhythm for the group to copy.
- Instruments can come from the kitchen: a pot and wooden spoon, a jar of rice with a tight lid.

Radio Play Reading

also: Reader's Theater, Play Reading

3-12 people · 30-60 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

Readers sit around a table and perform a short script aloud, like an old radio drama, with someone handling the sound effects.

YOU NEED

Large-print scripts of a short original or public-domain play, simple sound-effect items: a bell, a door knock, a coconut shell for hoofbeats

SETUP

Use a short script that's public domain or written by staff or the group itself. Print it in large type with each role highlighted in a different color. Assign parts ahead of time, with an option to just listen.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Read the title and cast list aloud.
2. Readers read their parts from their seats. Nobody has to memorize.
3. The sound-effects person adds knocks, footsteps and bells on cue.
4. Take a short break halfway and talk about what might happen next.

5. Finish with applause and a chat about the characters.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Nobody reads unless they want to. Audience members are part of the show.
- Check that the script's content suits the group.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: highlight each reader's lines and use 16-point type or larger.
- Hearing: seat readers close together with a small microphone if available.
- Memory: short scenes of 10 minutes; a narrator role can be shared by the leader.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Ask the group to write the next episode together for next week.
- Record a performance, with permission, and play it back at the next session.

LARGE-GROUP EVENTS

Team Trivia

also: Trivia Afternoon, Quiz Teams

6+ people · 30-60 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

Tables play as teams and answer rounds of questions on set categories, with answers written down and scored round by round.

YOU NEED

Answer sheets and pencils, a whiteboard for scores, questions written by the leader from reliable sources

SETUP

Seat four to six people per table, mixing strong readers and writers with others. Pick five categories, such as geography, food, the calendar, music titles and the local town, and write five questions for each from an encyclopedia, almanac or official source. Check every answer.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Each team picks a name; write the names on the board.
2. Read each question twice. Teams talk quietly and write their answer.
3. After five questions, read the answers and teams score their own sheets.
4. Post scores after each round.
5. End with a final round where teams can bet up to 10 points on one question, and announce the winning table.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Team scoring means no single person's answer is on display.
- Avoid questions that rely on very recent events; they can make people feel out of touch.

ADAPT IT

- Hearing: put each question on the board as you read it.
- Memory: team play spreads the load. Mixed tables let everyone add something.
- Vision: a table helper can read and write for the team.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Don't want to write questions? Ask each table to write three questions for the other teams, with answers, then play their questions.
- A local round (town history, street names, old landmarks) gets the most talk.

VARIATIONS

- Picture round: show large photos of famous places and ask where they are.

Dice Horse Race

also: Horse Race Game, Derby Day

6+ people · 30-60 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to moderate

Horses numbered 2 to 12 race down a track; each roll of two dice moves the matching horse a step forward, and the room cheers its horse home.

YOU NEED

Two large dice, a track: tape or a long paper strip with 10 to 12 spaces per lane, 11 paper horse cutouts numbered 2 to 12, small tokens or paper tickets for points

SETUP

Lay a track on a table or wall with 11 lanes numbered 2 to 12 and 10 spaces each. Give each person or table a horse number, or let them pick one for points. Announce that this is for points or small prizes, never money.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Each person or table chooses a horse number, drawn from a hat.
2. A resident rolls the two dice and calls out the total.
3. The track helper moves that horse one space forward.
4. Keep rolling until one horse crosses the finish line. That horse's backers win the round.

5. Run three or four races with new horse draws each time.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Play for points or small prizes only, never money.
- Seven comes up most often with two dice, and 2 and 12 rarely. Drawing horses from a hat keeps it fair, and you may want a small prize for the last-place horse too.

ADAPT IT

- Vision: a big track on a wall or easel and loud calls of each roll.
- Memory: give each person a large card showing their horse number.
- Hands: dice can be rolled from a cup into a large box lid.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Name the horses with the group, and have someone call the race like an announcer.
- Hats, ribbons and a snack table make it a themed event.

One-Minute Challenge Afternoon

also: Sixty-Second Games

6+ people · 45-75 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to moderate

A series of one-minute seated challenges, like stacking cups or clipping clothespins, played by teams for points.

YOU NEED

A timer, materials for 6 to 8 seated tasks: plastic cups, cotton balls and a spoon, a deck of cards, clothespins and a string, large nuts and bolts, a ball, scoreboard

SETUP

Set up six to eight stations or bring each challenge to the tables. Write the challenges on the board. Test each one first so it's possible in a minute from a chair.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Explain the first challenge and show it once.
2. Start the timer. Players or teams try to finish or score as much as they can in one minute.
3. Write the results on the board.
4. Move through the rest of the challenges, with a break halfway.
5. Total team points and give out small prizes.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Keep stakes low and laughs high. Nobody is ever "out."
- Avoid tasks with small objects in memory care, and any task that involves bending to the floor.

ADAPT IT

- Mobility: every task is done at a table or on a lap.
- Hands: offer two versions of each task, such as big and small clothespins.
- Memory: one task at a time, shown before it's timed.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Good challenges: stack 10 cups in a pyramid; move cotton balls between bowls with a spoon; clip clothespins on a line; sort a deck of cards by color; thread large bolts into nuts.
- Use a big, visible timer and count the last 10 seconds aloud.

Theme Day

also: Special Event Day

6+ people · 60-180 min · fully seated · gentle movement · levels: independent to later-stage

A whole afternoon built around one theme, such as a seaside day, a county fair, a diner, a garden party or a harvest festival, with music, food, decorations and games to match.

YOU NEED

Decorations for the theme, theme music, theme snacks that meet diet orders, activities from this library chosen to match

SETUP

Pick a theme a month ahead and put it on the calendar. Plan decorations, a playlist, a snack that suits diet orders, and two or three activities from this library. Invite families and volunteers.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Decorate the room the morning of the event.
2. Open with music and a short welcome that explains the theme.
3. Run two or three themed activities: a sing-along, a game and a hands-on task.
4. Serve the theme snack partway through.
5. Close with a group photo, with permission, and a calm song.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Big events can overwhelm some people. Have a quiet room nearby and staff ready to step out with anyone who needs a break.
- Check every snack against diet orders and texture levels.
- Holiday themes: offer events for a range of traditions, or seasonal themes that leave no one out.

ADAPT IT

- Later-stage: bring the theme to rooms with a small piece of it, like a seashell to hold or a summer song.
- Hearing: keep background noise down during talks and games.
- Mobility: plan everything to be done seated.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Theme ideas: a county fair with a pie table and blue ribbons, a diner with paper hats, a beach day with sand in a tub for feet, a garden party with flowers to arrange.
- Ask residents to vote on next month's theme.

Leisure Discussion Group

also: Leisure Education, Free Time Talk

3-12 people · 30-45 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

A discussion group where people talk about what makes free time good for them, look at the options available, and try one new thing.

YOU NEED

Whiteboard, a calendar of upcoming activities, a sheet listing local resources: library, senior center, parks

SETUP

Run as a weekly series of four to six sessions. Each session has one question, such as "What did you do for fun at 30?" or "What would you like to learn?"

HOW TO PLAY

1. Start with the week's question and write answers on the board.
2. Talk about what got in the way of hobbies before, and what gets in the way now.
3. Look at the activity calendar and local options together.
4. Each person picks one thing to try that week, or chooses to watch for now.
5. Next session, start by hearing how it went.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Some people have lost hobbies to illness or a move. Listen, and look for ways a hobby can come back in a new form.
- Never push. Choosing not to join an activity is a choice too.

ADAPT IT

- Hearing: small group, close seating, written notes on the board.
- Memory: give each person a card with their choice for the week.
- Mobility: include options that come to the person, like books, music or a visiting program.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Recreation therapy students can use this as a practicum group.
- Invite a former participant to share a hobby they picked up.

Joke and Riddle Circle

also: Humor Hour, Laugh Circle

3-30 people · 15-30 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to moderate

The group takes turns reading or telling clean jokes and riddles from cards, and swaps favorite funny stories.

YOU NEED

A stack of clean jokes and riddles written on cards, optional funny photos

SETUP

Write 30 or so clean, old-fashioned jokes and riddles on large-print cards. Avoid jokes about age, memory loss, illness or any group of people.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Read the first joke yourself to set the tone.
2. Pass the card stack around. Anyone can read one or pass the stack on.
3. For riddles, give the group time to guess before the answer.
4. Invite people to tell a joke they know, or a funny thing that happened at work or home.
5. Close with the corniest joke in the pile.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Screen jokes beforehand; nobody should be the butt of a joke.
- Laugh with, never at.

ADAPT IT

- Hearing: put the punchline on the board after it's read.
- Memory: short riddles with a picture answer work well.
- Vision: a staff member reads cards for anyone who can't.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Groan-worthy puns get the room going. A bad joke is a good joke here.
- Start a joke book from the group's own contributions.

Hobby Show and Tell

also: Collections Day, Hobby Fair

4+ people · 30-60 min · fully seated · calm · levels: independent to mild

Residents, staff and family members bring something from a hobby or collection, set up a small display, and talk about it with the group.

YOU NEED

Tables for displays, name cards, items residents, staff and families bring: quilts, photos, stamps, model trains, recipes, tools

SETUP

Invite people two weeks ahead and give everyone the option to bring a photo of a hobby instead of the real thing. Set up tables around the room, each with a name card.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Give people time to set up their displays, with help.
2. Let the room walk or wheel around the tables for 15 minutes, or bring items to people who stay seated.
3. Invite each presenter to say a few words about their hobby, or answer a couple of questions from the leader.
4. Close by asking who would like to try one of the hobbies, and note any ideas for future activity groups.

CARE AND DIGNITY

- Label valuables and keep them on display tables, not passed around. Return everything to its owner at the end.
- Nobody has to present. Visiting the tables is a full part of the event.

ADAPT IT

- Mobility: staff carry small items to anyone who can't move around the room.
- Hearing: presenters speak into a microphone or stand close to the group.
- Memory: a leader can interview a presenter with simple prompts: "How did you start? What's your favorite piece?"

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Staff hobbies count too. A staff member's knitting or fishing flies can start long conversations.
- Collections can lead to new groups: a card club, a garden club, a quilting circle.