

Food: The Great Communicator

Recommended Participants: Residents, staff, and family members

Activity Type: Small group using discussion, meal planning, and dining

Explanation: This activity is used to demonstrate the resident's right to a dignified existence, self-determination and communication with and access to persons and services inside and outside the facility, participation in care planning, voice grievances, e. g., about food, and perform services for the facility, e. g., preparation of food. The desired outcome for this activity is for staff, residents, and family members to understand that the preparation and serving of food is a metaphor for community, connection, and being valued.

This activity involves a planning meeting, a meal and group discussions. The group coordinator determines whether the facility or an outside source will fund the meal. Once sponsorship is determined residents, family, and staff who are willing to participate in a meal and discussion together are identified. A group size of seven to ten is suggested. A meeting with these individuals is scheduled to solicit ideas for the menu, location, date, time and any other preferences. Multi-cultural food preferences are included in the conversation. A discussion of some of the questions on the handouts can also be included in the meeting. Participants are asked if they want to be involved in any of the food preparation activities.

If the facility agrees to provide the meal, facility representatives attend this meeting to communicate what meal services are available. If funding is attained from an outside source, the budget is explained to the attendees. When the meal takes place, the discussion questions on the handouts are used before, during, and/or after the meal. The meal itself is evaluated for how well it achieved a feeling of community, connection, and being valued.

This activity may be done using the questions on the handout only. The discussion and results improve when an actual dining experience is included.

Adaptations: To adapt this group activity for individuals, videotape the group program (with the participants' permission) and show and discuss the video in individual resident rooms; offer an individualized meal if possible. For groups and/or individuals, enlarge the handouts and/or ask all the questions verbally. During the meal, arrange participants in a circle; the group leader should sit next to participants with hearing impairments and repeat the discussion. The participation of residents who have early, or middle stage dementia is improved by using simple explanations and repetition.

The Fellowship of Eating

What are your favorite foods?

Where do you like to eat these foods?

Do you cook?

- If yes, who do you like to cook for? or Who did you most enjoy cooking for when you were living at home?

Who do you invite to share your favorite foods or favorite restaurants?

What family or cultural food traditions do you have to celebrate special occasions?

- Birthdays
- Thanksgiving
- Religious holidays
- Other Occasions

What was the kitchen like when you grew up? Identify feelings & sensory experiences.

What is the kitchen like at your house now? or What was the kitchen like when you were living at home?

Encourage participants to respond to the idea on the following page and then proceed with the questions below:

How does preparing food relate to a sense of community?

How does serving food relate to a sense of community?

How does eating food relate to a sense of community?

Can you give examples of dining experiences which made you feel special?

Are there occasions you remember which involved food that are especially memorable to you? If yes, describe what made those occasions special?

What is the dining experience like at the nursing home?

Could it be improved? If so, how?

If a meal is served, ask:

What did you like about today's dining experience? What could be improved?

**The Preparation & Serving of
Food is a Metaphor for
Community, Connection, &
Being Valued.**

**It is a metaphor for loving &
being loved.**