



Response Time

During the response time opportunities are given for creativity, expression and play. The choices given in the Response Time are dependent on the setting. Older people often find it hard to play if they are used to being told what to do and what the final product should be, although some people with dementia are very playful. This raises questions about how much scaffolding the older people need to be able to enter into the creative process, especially during the Response Time, and whether good spiritual care is about helping the older adults to find new ways of connecting with themselves, with others and with God or whether it is about supporting them in their familiar ways. Perhaps it is both.

Ideas for Resources to Encourage Creativity with Older People

It is very important that the resources do not appear childish. Here are some ideas that work with older people.

Oil and sand pictures; coloured sheep wool; buddha water boards (can be purchase from Xihaha); marble/painted/wooden eggs; holding crosses; hand massage; textured fabric; reminiscence items (childhood, wash day, make do and mend etc) finger labyrinths; mandalas to colour; shells; wooden tree blocks; tools; paints; pens; colouring books; Bible verses; hymn book; beautiful pictures; wooden pegs; twiddle muffs; poems; creative writing; prayers; personalised music on an ipod; cross making; coloured sand pictures; cards; sorting boxes (tools, ribbons, buttons etc); photographs.

Use of Story Boxes in Response Time

Each person in the group is given a gold 'Story Box' in which they can store objects that are special to them, including from their life story and from the Godly Play stories. The sensory stimulation helps them—during the individual response time—to access memories of their own story as well as the Christian story. The Story boxes are given to everyone in the session, including carers, so that the people with dementia are not singled out and so that all take part."

Reflections from the Field

1. *"Barbara, laid out the ten commandments from the story and a large shell on a coffee table and spent half an hour drawing the shell and writing some commandments inside and around a big heart. She was pleased with her finished picture— 'Do not covet what others have' was written out three times along with a new commandment 'Honour yourself.' She explained that she no longer has parents and so had written a new commandment."*

2. *"I am finding that those who struggle with memory problems respond better to the response material when I say we are getting ready for our tea party. I then offer them a choice of materials on a tray to get ready and say would you help me by polishing or painting etc. I get better participation as many of my Elders don't know what they want to do, and their default mode is no thanks. The brass and wood polishing that we have been doing lately has worked wonders and i am getting some really good responses verbally from this activity. I pre-rub the beeswax polish onto the wood and for both the wood and brass polishing just hand out those microfibre cloths, so we don't need to use any brass polish or chemicals. The watercolour painting works best when I have a number of volunteers with me rather than just myself and the doorman. We have also tried salt dough, edible herbs and flowers, for some flower arranging pastels and pencils with mixed results. I plan to continue to trial various craft response materials. i do play some background hymns and sometimes people sing along during the response time we even had someone dancing to the music as their response."*

3. *"The buddha board - on which people use a paintbrush to make marks using water - is a fantastic way of 'meditating with art materials' A gentleman with dementia was totally absorbed in painting for 20 minutes last week... and occasionally shared things with me as he worked. I would recommend the black version of 'Laptop Buddha Board' by Buddha Board 32 x 27.7cm. Cheapest price is £19.95. You can also get the smaller version. There are cheaper coloured alternatives, but they do not give such a bold effect. We are going to experiment with putting these laptops buddha boards onto lap trays."*

4. *"I have had such a great time at our Godly Play elders' meeting in the dementia wing of our local nursing home today. I have been given a wooden standing cross which I found really helped visually remind people the purpose of our meeting as did the Holy family and people loved holding the different objects as part of their response time. I have made my fidget blankets using the baby blankets with the little soft toy in the centre and then themed them adding ribbons and its and they really helped two of my elders who struggle to engage to sit through the session and participate. I am hoping to make themed Fidget blankets or cloths with some of the central bible stories on them."*

"They are cushion sized and I make use of ribbon and bits and pieces. I am hoping to make a Jonah blanket and a Noah one as well as some of the parables. This week one of my regular volunteers said it was the best Godly Play session ever. The singing also worked well as a response and I used my phone and a little speaker, and we sang along to some hymns while some people did their craft response. As always the brass polishing was a success too."

Fidget blankets <http://www.suggys.co.uk/Leanne/alzheimersdementia-fidget-lap-blanket/>

6. "This afternoon I had the privilege of helping at a Godly Play session in a care home for older people. The story of the Ten Best ways was shared and after some verbal wondering we invited the elders to work with / play /wonder using a choice of response materials. The elders either got up and choose their own materials or asked us to bring something to them. Some were engaged for at least 30 minutes in their chosen activity. The choices were: tree blocks, thick felt pieces, dyed merino wool, shells, clay, smooth wooden ovals to hold, a buddha board, pastels and colouring pencils and of course the story materials. These photos are taken with permission to share with you. Both of the ladies are living with dementia. Notice the 11th best way that has been created - HONOUR YOURSELF. This lady also wanted to take home the stone that says 'Keep the Sabbath holy' (it's not on the table because she had tucked it into her name badge as it was the one she had said during the wondering time that she likes the most) so we made one of these out of card for her to take back to her room. The tree blocks were used to create a forest - with crowns for all the trees and 10 stepping stones, plus 3 extras (there are 13 plaques in the 10 Best Ways story). The lady who created this commented that she had been told at school that she was no good at art - but that today she had created something very artistic. The response time naturally flowed into the feast time - with people who wanted to continue with their response able to spend more time on this whilst others could have a cup of tea and a homemade biscuit whilst chatting with the helpers. I felt blessed to be part of this special time that was honouring to all those who were present."

7. "We spent about 45 minutes filling in the evaluation sheets in the session on 27th Jan and the learning for the response time included the following:

1) It was important to give the elders enough time (30 minutes) to really enter into their response or such deep work would not have occurred. However, some of the elders chose not to respond with any of the materials and so it was appropriate that they were given their feast earlier (so there wasn't a clear distinction between the Response Time and the Feast (see more under the 'Feast' document).

2) A choice of materials was very important. The lady who used the tree blocks commented that at school she was told she was 'no good at art' and she may not have wanted to respond with pastels the way another lady had.

3) *Having low tables - an appropriate height for the armchairs - on which to respond made all the difference.*

4) *The care assistant (who has received some training), the doorman, the storyteller and the extra helper were all careful not to influence the responses of the elders who were given autonomy over what they were doing. Sometimes it felt appropriate to sit with an elder as they worked e.g. to help pick out the small shells from a box. Most of the one to one chatting with the elders was done during the feast although there was some during the response time. We need to be mindful of not interrupting the flow in our attempts to be helpful and friendly, but at the same time a few words may give encouragement."*

8. *"Here's a fabulous idea for the Baptism story... Yo, the doorman, brought scented hypo-allergenic hand cream and offered hand massages to the elders during the response time. A real ministry of presence and blessing. (Practical point - bring along antibacterial handwipes for yourself to use in between giving each person the massage in order to prevent the spread of germs)"*

9. *"Residents also enjoyed running their hands through a bowl of water and holding the baby doll. Another resident spent 15 mins painting on a buddha board."*

10. *"Yo did the '10 Best Ways' with 5 residents yesterday. We passed around the 10 wooden templates among the residents during response. We wondered if it would have been useful to have had a laminated list of the 10 commandments for residents to look at, so they could see all the commandments listed collectively as well as seeing/reading each commandment on a separate marker which may be quite disjointed for some residents."*

11. *"I can see why a laminated sheet is a practical option as it can be wiped and will last longer but I prefer reading things on card that aren't laminated (which can feel 'plasticky' and can be harder to read if the light shines on the in a particular way)"*

12. *"During the Response Time people were given the choice as to what object they wanted to hold. Dora held a compact mirror and chatted to a member of the team about how at 80 years old she had written an article for a newspaper on fashion for older women. The conversation and mood then shifted, as it often does with Dora, when she began to focus on the mistakes she had made in life. The team member suggested that they both look into the mirror and say to themselves, and to each other—'You are a beautiful person.' They laughed great big belly laughs, as they did this."*

13. *"During the response time a lady came in late, so I showed the story to her and then we got chatting. She used to sing in her church choir but felt pushed out towards the end. Together we quietly practised singing 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow' and she was surprised at how the tune just came to her (though she struggled to recall the words). At the final blessing this lady beautifully led us in the singing. Although she usually goes out on a Tuesday she is going to make sure that she is around to join us from the beginning in a fortnight. I can't wait!"*

14. *"During the Response Time Edna chose to write out John 3:16 'For God so loved the world ...' and was pleased to read these words out to everyone during the Feast."*

15. *"We now have a member of staff with us each time we run a session. For the Baptism story in January I took in 6 newborn baby dolls of various ethnicities all in knitwear and said I had bought them in to show off the knitwear and we talked about who had received knitted jumpers or hats or scarfs as presents and who loved knitting. We had a mixed group of people with their full faculties and those with quite advanced dementia. I asked which residents would like to hold the dolls while we did the story, and all were warmly accepted and enjoyed. After singing we got ready and I presented the baptism story. A lady my age with MS that was in for rehab after a fall was really touched by the story and spoke in length about personal matters relating to the story. All 16 residents participated and when tea arrived we were able to gently retrieve the dolls by offering to look after them during tea. Some of which had become babies to those holding them. We found the addition of the dolls made the Baptism story come alive for the residents."*