

Relaxing Through the **ARTS**

The Group Session



Nursing Home
Outreach Program

INTRODUCTION

Relaxing Through the Arts is based on the concept that both relaxation and haiku arts encourage a relaxed state of mental alertness; an orientation to the day, the time and the season that encourages deep engagement with the present moment, and holds people more firmly in time and space. In addition, this state of relaxed attention stimulates both imagination and a heightening of the senses.



Nursing home residents often have very little contact with the out of doors, with nature. This program is especially designed to put residents in contact with nature, with what they have loved, experiences they have had, and what has made them happy over time. Haiku – related arts are perfect for this, as haiku is a short nature poem that connects nature and human nature. Relaxation and guided visualization also put people back in touch with their own senses as they remember and experience the natural world through visualization and relaxation.

This program is designed for a group of elders meeting twice a month for about 45 minutes to an hour.

THE GROUP SESSION

Each session should take about 45 minutes but you can take a shorter or longer time depending on the needs of your group of residents. Most groups will be from 5 - 15 people. We are looking for consistency in attendance. You will most likely have a core group with some residents who come and go. Remember that residents could be sick or having medical appointments from time to time.

This is the session outline. We will go over what each of these segments mean.

- Hi and Welcome
- Participant Introductions
- Relaxation Activity
- Reading and reflection
- Simple arts activity
- Writing group poems
- Hand-warming
- Close

Before you begin, take some time to get to know your resident group.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

What do you like to do? What have been your interests and past times?

What kind of work did you do as a younger person?

What kinds of hobbies have you had? What do you enjoy doing? What do you like in terms of nursing home activities and events? Do you like arts and crafts? Music? Any type of art work? Do you enjoy reading? Watching movies? Going outside when you can?

This is the time to gather ideas for themes and topics for your group.

YOU CAN ALSO BEGIN TO OBSERVE INDIVIDUAL ABILITIES.

Are people able to write or does arthritis or other difficulties prevent them from doing this?

Can they do small projects or do they need help with cutting, pasting, and other crafts activities?

What are their strengths and limitations regarding hearing, vision, and mobility?

What about memory or cognitive ability?



Be sure to accommodate to these needs as you plan and carry out the arts activities. You may need to write for people, help them cut or paste photos or other nature images onto cards, or come prepared already with some folded paper for simple origami. You want to prepare for an accessible and enjoyable experience that encourages creativity and sharing.

PREPARATION FOR YOUR GROUP



Most residents will be brought to the group by nursing home staff. While this is happening, set up the table so everyone has a seat and can see each other.

Once the table is set up, put down a small cloth with a candle in the middle. Use a battery run candle. If you do not have a candle, a small plant or other natural object will do.

OPENING THE SESSION

Meet and greet each person as they enter the room and take their place at the table. Open the session by welcoming people, saying your name, the name of the program and reflecting back to previous sessions. Mention too the date and the season. People may forget your name but after awhile they will not forget you. They just may need a little prompting.

Ask for introductions as you write down names or use an attendance checklist.

Go over briefly what you will do today in the group session: what the theme of the session is and how it relates back to previous sessions. *For example: This is late fall so we will be talking about trees and leaves. Last time we talked about Halloween.* Also include that they will be doing a relaxation piece, some reading and reflection, an activity related to the time of the year, and ending with some group poems, and our hand warming.

RELAXATION EXERCISE

Make sure people are comfortable and then talk through, slowly and clearly the Relaxation Exercise. Lead them through so you can model this. Be sure always to say that people should do only what is comfortable for them. You can adjust depending on how the group is doing and how people are responding. Talk loudly and clearly and yet also make sure the tone of your voice is comfortable.

See page 6 for Relaxation Exercise



READING REFLECTION

Once the residents are relaxed and feeling a sense of calm, read two or three pages of the book, Clear Water: a haiku invitation into our sacred, luminous world. These reflections relate to and provide a transition to the arts activity that follows. Be sure to read clearly and loudly as you may be competing with noise in the area, and also with hearing loss. After you read, ask for any comments. Do not worry if no one wants to add anything.

THE HAIKU ARTS ACTIVITY

The purpose of each activity is to help residents reconnect with a part of themselves that has been lost or put aside. Rekindling an interest, hobby, or enjoyable memory helps to overcome loneliness and the sense of disconnection people feel upon entering a nursing home. When people rediscover and embrace what they love, they become whole again.

Allow about 20-30 minutes for the arts activity. Make sure that each person takes what they have made with them to their room. Be sure to encourage your residents to keep the projects in a folder, perhaps which you have provided, and be sure to comment on past projects you have done together when you see them in her room. This helps to add continuity and deepen the connection with the themes presented.



See: Simple Nature Poems/Arts Activities

CREATING A GROUP HAIKU POEM

The group poem, made by the group with your input, helps to strengthen and endorse the arts activity you have just completed. It also firms up the seasonal aspect of the activity and the connection with the natural world just outside the window.

See page 8 for Writing Haiku Together.

THE HAND WARMING



As you begin to finish your session, remind people that this is the time for our hand-warming. Have each person cup her palms together while you give them a dollop of scented hand cream. Hold their hands gently as you do this. Each person then massages her hands with the cream as the fragrance of the hand cream fills the room. We comment on the beauty of the fragrance and also our time together.

CLOSING

Thank each person for coming to the group. Say you are looking forward to seeing them next time, letting them know when that next time will be.

RELAXATION EXERCISE

INTRODUCTION

In general nursing home residents enjoy and appreciate the opportunity to do some simple stretching and relaxation activities. This activity has been field tested in nursing home groups and is easily done. Read through the activity slowly, with a calm but clear voice. Make sure everyone can hear you. Do the activity with the group so they can follow you. Feel free to adjust this activity to the needs of your group and also to what you may want to include. The key is to keep it simple.

Note: make sure people only do what is comfortable and safe for them. For example, if someone cannot raise their hands over their heads, they can just lift a hand or arm a little bit, if they are able.

THE EXERCISE

Sit back, relax. Take a long, slow deep breath.

Take another deep breath, a sigh. As you sigh, let yourself feel more relaxed. Then return to your natural breathing. Notice your breath as you breathe in and out, as you inhale and exhale. Take your time; there is no need to rush.



Now, let's take a nice stretch.

As you can and if this is okay, take both your arms and raise them above your head. Look up, and wiggle your fingers. Now gently drop your arms and hands into your lap. Let them rest there a moment. We will do this one more time. Raise your arms, feel the stretch, look up and know that above the ceiling is the sky, so you are looking upward toward the sky. Wiggle your fingers, now; gently drop your hands and your arms into your lap.



Take a deep breath. Relax.

Stretch out your arm in front of you. Wiggle your fingers. Do this with one arm and then the other arm. Notice the feeling of relaxation as your stretch and move your arms and hands.

Now, take a long slow breath and return to your natural breathing.

Notice the relaxation in your stomach, your torso, and your back. Move and loosen your shoulders, we tend to move our shoulder up toward our ears as the day progresses so moving your shoulder is a good way to relax.



If this is comfortable and okay, move your head very gently from side to side.

Turn your head to one side, and then very gently move it to the other side. Feel the stretch of your neck. If you want to, move your head up as you look up at the ceiling. Then very slowly drop your head toward your chest, feeling the stretch in your neck as you become more relaxed.



Let's turn our attention to our hands.

Rub your hands together to make a little friction and heat, and then rest your hands on your shoulders for a little massage. Do this again, and then rest your hands on the back of your neck. If you want, also, cup your hands over your eyes to deepen the feeling of relaxation.

We carry a lot of tension in our hands.

Massage your hands together, moving your hands against your palms and your wrists, up your arms a little bit, and then back to your hands. Remember all that your hands have done over the years: cooking, getting dressed, working, maybe gardening. Be grateful for your hands.

Now wave your hands – Hi! Hi!

And as we finish our relaxation, put your arms around yourself and give yourself a hug. We all deserve a hug. This feels good, good to relax.



WRITING HAIKU TOGETHER

Writing haiku can be a solitary experience, but there also is a long tradition of writing haiku in groups, and sharing and writing together on retreat with a mentor or teacher.

Nursing homes too can be a place to write haiku together, in the Relaxing Through the Arts group, or one on one with your elder resident friend. Writing with two or three people is also a fine way to create poems that come from collective experience or different ways of seeing the same theme or topic of nature.



Here are several ways to write a haiku together. Choose one or two of these and then, if you want, see what you can develop on your own. Do not hesitate to help with the lines. You may need to prompt people with suggestions and encouragement. This is what a group poem is all about. The end result will be a feeling of creative accomplishment.

HAIKU AS DESCRIPTION/FEELING

Ask for an object of nature: that is your first line. Something visible. Consider examples related to the theme of your session. For example: tulip, Autumn leaf, seashell, and so on.

The second line describes the first line in greater detail. Ask for a description or a sensory experience of the first line.

The third line contributes a feeling or reaction to the first two lines.

*seashell
small, brown ripples
warm in my hand*

*storm clouds
heavy with rain
I feel cold*

*tulips
come only in spring
happiness*

*Maple leaf
turning color
its almost winter*



HAIKU AS DIRECT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The first line sets the time.
The second line sets the place.
The third line describes the feeling.

Examples from nursing home groups:

*winter afternoon
alone in my room
I feel calm*

*midnight
so many stars
I am filled with wonder*



*spring morning
breakfast time
hungry for eggs*

*hot summer day
inside it is cool
no sweat on my brow*

HAIKU AS COMMUNICATION WITH NATURE

This haiku poses a question, in three lines, to an object of nature. The lines can be arranged to have a pop little surprise at the end.

Examples:

*canary -
are you happy
in your cage?*

*goldfish
in your aquarium
are you having fun?*



*what used to
live in you,
seashell?*

*where are you
when it's not raining.
storm cloud?*

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

- Take a line from a haiku and add two more lines to it to form your own collective haiku.
- List out descriptions of a nature object and form them into a poem.
- Read a short essay or story and ask for words that stand out, then form these into a poem.
- Experiment with your own ways of writing haiku together.
- Be sure to keep the poems for posting someplace and also for individual folders.

Note: Be sure to use the haiku poems in the back of the Simple Nature Poems/Arts Activities section.

Have Fun!