

Dissemination Slide Deck

Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide:

Evidence-based activities for older adults

Developed by: The Behavioural Supports Ontario Provincial Coordinating Office

January 2026



Behavioural Supports Ontario
Soutien en cas des troubles du comportement en Ontario

Welcome everyone and thank them all for attending.

Initial Reflection

Initial Reflection

The Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide reinforces that engagement is not about a one-time activity, but rather an ongoing, intentional process grounded in trust, equity, and shared responsibility.



- The guide highlights the importance of meeting the individual where they are valuing lived experience alongside professional expertise.
- A key takeaway is the shift from “informing” or “consulting” individual care partners to truly empowering them in shared decision-making.
- The practical tools and examples provide a useful framework for moving from good intentions to consistent, meaningful practice.
- Overall, the guide challenges organizations to reflect on not just *who* is engaged, but *how* and *why* engagement happens.

What is Meaningful Engagement?

- Activities and interactions that are grounded based on a person’s identity, preferences, abilities, and life story.
- Moves beyond “keeping busy” to create purpose, joy, comfort, and connection.
- Supports all aspects of the individual
- Promotes dignity, autonomy, belonging, and person-centered care.

Care and support goes beyond maintaining someone’s physical health, we need to broaden our approach to care for the whole person and support their quality of life.

It’s not just about keeping busy, it’s about truly engaging and cherishing our time together.

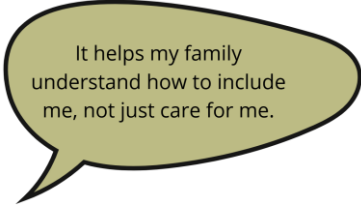


Suggested speaking points:

- When we talk about meaningful activities, we’re not just talking about things to pass the time.
- These are activities and interactions that are grounded based on the person’s identity, preferences, abilities, and life story.
- This approach moves us beyond “keeping busy” or filling a schedule. Instead, the focus is on creating purpose, joy, comfort, and connection - things that are deeply human and deeply personal.
- Meaningful activities support the whole person. That includes physical, cognitive engagement, emotional, abilities, social wellbeing, spiritual expression, and cultural identity. (think PIECES!)
- At the core, this is about dignity and autonomy. It’s about helping people feel a sense of belonging and choice, and ensuring care is truly person-centered, not task-driven.
- When activities are meaningful, they become a form of care - not an add-on

Why is Meaningful Engagement Important?

- Reduces boredom, loneliness, and unmet needs that often lead to responsive behaviours/personal expressions.
- Decrease the risk of delirium.
- Improves mood, cognitive stimulation, connection, and overall quality of life.
- Lowers stress for care partners by creating smoother, more positive interactions
- Supports restraint reduction by addressing root causes of distress in safer, person-centred ways
- Strengthens inclusivity by honouring each person's cultural identity, values, and lived experience



It helps my family understand how to include me, not just care for me.



- Meaningful engagement isn't a 'nice to have' - it's a protective measure and part of everyday life. Hobbies and interests are things that make you feel good and bring you joy.
- When people experience boredom, loneliness, or unmet needs, those feelings often show up as responsive behaviours or personal expressions.
- By meeting needs before distress escalates, meaningful engagement can reduce the risk of delirium, particularly in unfamiliar or high-stimulating environments (would provide as an example: on a surgery unit in a hospital).
- We consistently see improvements in mood, connection, cognitive stimulation, and overall quality of life when activities are purposeful and personalized.
- This doesn't just benefit the person receiving care - it also supports care partners.
- When interactions are more positive and predictable, stress is reduced, and relationships feel more collaborative.
- Meaningful engagement also plays a key role in restraint reduction. By addressing the root causes of distress - rather than reacting to behaviours - we can respond in safer, more person-centered ways. Keeping individuals meaningfully engaged can reduce the personal expressions and in turn reducing the need to think about using physical or chemical restraints as the underlying unmet need is being addressed.

- Finally, this work strengthens inclusivity.
When we honour cultural identity, values, and lived experience, people feel seen, respected, and more willing to engage.
- At its heart, meaningful engagement is about prevention, connection, and dignity.

Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide:

Evidence-based activities for older adults

Background of the *NEW* Resource Guide:

- Created an enhanced resource guide for ALL sectors.
- Promotes non-pharmacological approaches to unmet needs.
- Provides inclusive, accessible strategies that embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion for culture considerations.
- Aims to reduce chemical & physical restraint use in hospitals.
- Anyone can use it: point of care team members, volunteers, family, older adult leaders/residents.
- Fosters purposeful engagement and improved quality of life for older adults.

Using engagement interventions and approaches has shown a reduction in the use of physical and chemical restraints, and staff using these ideas have found it easier to care for their patients.



- The idea for developing a resource came from the work of the BSO Acute Care Collaborative and the project work around restraint reduction. Through their work, the group identified a clear need for more robust and meaningful engagement strategies, particularly in hospital and acute care settings.
- The Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide builds on a successful previous resource from North East Ontario—the NE BSO Cookbook: Recipes for Innovation in Long-Term Care.”
- The cookbook was developed by long-term care homes in the North East during a collaborative BSO / Seniors Mental Health Consultation Service event in 2019. It highlighted emerging and best practices for implementing non-pharmacological strategies with residents in long-term care.
- The resource was organized by theme and supported with additional tools, aiming to spread person-centered innovations across other long-term care homes.
- As the exploration of a new guide was underway, a review of the NE cookbook, identifying gaps and areas for enhancement, with the goal of scaling and spreading effective practices across the province and across sectors.
- The enhanced resource guide is designed for those who are working with older adults in promoting non-pharmacological approaches to address unmet needs

and, as indicated earlier, supporting the reduction of chemical and physical restraints, particularly in hospital and acute care settings.

- A literature review with over 80 references informed the content, ensuring the guide is grounded in evidence and best practices.
- It is designed for anyone to use - point-of-care team members, volunteers, family members, and even older adults or resident leaders.
- The guide offers inclusive, accessible strategies that embrace equity, diversity, and cultural considerations, recognizing that meaningful engagement looks different for everyone. The goal is to explore opportunities for purposeful engagement to improve the quality of life for older adults.

Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide:

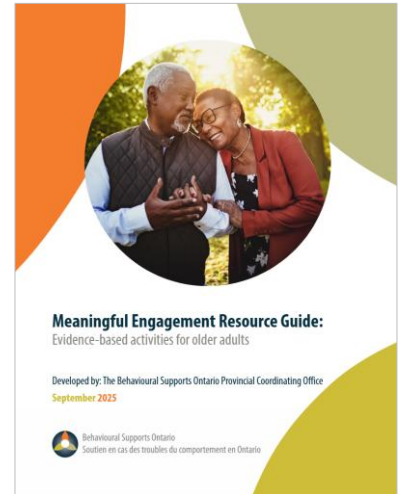
Evidence-based activities for older adults

Purpose of the resource guide:

Offer a range of evidence-based, non-pharmacological activities designed to promote purposeful engagement and enhance the well-being of older adults across various care sectors.



Officially Launched: September 9, 2025



- The resource complements existing professional expertise, supporting recreation therapists, art or music therapists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and other specialists, while strengthening a multidisciplinary approach.
- It offers a range of evidence-based, non-pharmacological activities designed to enhance the wellbeing of older adults across multiple care sectors (if applicable) - I'll be sharing the link in the chat so you can explore the guide and return to it after today's session. <https://brainxchange.ca/Public/Special-Pages/BSO/Files/MERG/BSO-Meaningful-Engagement-Resource-Guide.aspx> (Insert link in chat pod) – There are other resources on the webpage that we'll talk about shortly, but one that might be of interest is the webinar recording.
- The goal was to create a practical, easy-to-use resource - one that supports purposeful engagement and can be applied by various individuals across different care settings, including hospitals, long-term care, and community environments.
- This guide is intended to be a support - something teams can reach for when they're looking for safer, more meaningful alternatives.
- Ultimately, this resource guide was created to support meaningful, purposeful engagement in a practical way. Scan the QR code to get direct access to the guide!

Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide:

Evidence-based activities for older adults

Guidelines for Use:

- Step 1:** Complete My Personhood Summary©
- Step 2:** Consider the 5 Senses
- Step 3:** Consult the Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide
- Step 4:** Implement and Evaluate
- Step 5:** Document

There are many recreation based resources out there, but this one stands out because it provides a guidelines for use and integrates other BSO related tools into it, making it very practical.



- The guide provides a five-step process to tailor them to each person’s unique preferences, abilities, and life history.
- **Step 1: Complete BSO’s My Personhood Summary©**
This step gathers personal information about the individual, including preferences, strengths, interests (past and current), and even potential dislikes. This ensures a person-centered approach from the start.
- **Step 2: Consider the five senses**
Assessing abilities and potential barriers to participation is important. Consider the following: vision, auditory, touch and feel, smell, and taste. Examples include: lighting, glasses, hearing aids, or other sensory needs. Taking the senses into account helps create a well-rounded and personalized experience. This is also a delirium preventative approach.
- **Step 3: Consult the MERG**
Choose the activity that best aligns with the individual’s needs, interests, and goals. This ensures the activity is meaningful and engaging.

- **Step 4: Implement and evaluate**

Observe cues such as body language, facial expressions, and verbal feedback. Adjustments can be made as needed to enhance engagement and enjoyment.

- **Step 5: Documentation**

Recording the activity's outcomes supports continuity of care. Share whether the person enjoyed the activity, what adjustments were made, and which cues helped enhance the experience. This helps future interactions be even more successful.

- Following these steps ensures activities are not only meaningful but also effective in supporting the person's well-being.

Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide:

Evidence-based activities for older adults

Table of Contents:

- Introduction
- Multisensory Therapies
- Memory and Reflection
- Body & Movement
- Creative & Expressive Arts
- Cognitive Stimulation & Skill Development
- Technology & Multi-media
- Beliefs & Practice

| Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide: | |
|--|--|
| Evidence-based activities for older adults | |
| Introduction | Creative & Expressive Arts Continued... |
| Feedback Survey | Visual Art |
| Contributors & Acknowledgments | 1. Orange Prism |
| Background | 2. Finger Painting |
| Guidelines for Use | 3. Sun Paper Collage |
| Multisensory Therapies | 4. Nature Collage |
| Tactile Sensory Stimulation | 5. Magazine Cut-Out Art |
| Technological Sensory Stimulation | 6. Guided Drawing |
| Rocking Chair Stimulation | 7. Tactile Art |
| Multisensory Stimulation | 8. Clay Modeling |
| Simulated Fire Experience | 9. Photography |
| Live Performance | 10. Painting to Music |
| Guided Self-Expression | 11. Jewelry Making |
| Memory & Reflection | Cognitive Stimulation |
| Supportive Orientation Practices | 6. Skill Development |
| Reminiscing Activities | Brain Teasers & Strategy Based Activities |
| Letter Writing & Message Making | Laundry Day |
| Book Club | Setting |
| Body & Movement | Invoice Activity |
| Active Living Programs | Job Board |
| Nature-Based Wellness | Technology & Multi-media |
| Creative & Expressive Arts | Exploring Visual Resources |
| Music | Virtual Reality VR |
| Woodworking | Music Makers |
| Knitting | Beliefs and Practice |
| Sewing | Cultural, Spiritual, Religious |
| Horticulture: Gardening | Myths, Values and Traditions |
| Horticulture: Flower Arranging | References |
| Gallery Experiences | |

The activities here remind me that I still have so much to offer.

- Each topic in the resource guide includes several suggested activities.
- The activity names throughout the guide have been carefully reviewed and, where necessary, revised to ensure they are respectful, non-infantilizing, and do not devalue any profession.
- The aim is to use person-centered and empowering language - not only for older adults, but also for staff, volunteers, and family members using the guide.
- The Table of Contents is hyperlinked in the digital version, making virtual navigation quick and easy.
- In addition, the guide includes QR codes in certain sections to ensure equal access to the named resources, whether using a digital or printed version - for example, accessing the My Personhood Summary.
- The guide is designed to be accessible and practical, so that meaningful engagement can be implemented smoothly across settings and by all members of the care team.



Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide: Evidence-based activities for older adults

Activity Layout:

- Consistent structure for easy use.
- Objective and materials needed.
- Instructions for both individual and group-based activities.
- Adaptation tip to adjust the activity to various care settings, abilities, needs, and cultural considerations.



- Now, let's take a closer look at how each activity is presented in the guide.
- Each section begins with its own sub-table of contents, which is hyperlinked for easy navigation in the digital version. This makes it simple for staff to quickly find the activity they need.
- Activities follow a consistent and intuitive structure:
 - Title and objective - so it's immediately clear what the purpose of the activity is.
 - Materials needed - everything required is listed up front.
 - Step-by-step instructions - covering both individual and group settings, ensuring flexibility.
- At the end of each activity, adaptation tips are provided. These help adjust the activity for different care settings, abilities, and cultural considerations.
- Reviewing these adaptation tips before starting ensures that whoever is facilitating feels confident, prepared, and capable of providing a meaningful experience.
- The overall design is intentional: activities are broken down, simple to follow, adaptable, and person-centered.
- Incorporating this guide into the organization would streamline activity planning, support staff confidence, and enhance the meaningful engagement of residents, ultimately improving quality of life and the care environment.



- This structure ensures every engagement is geared towards the individual, purposeful, flexible, and supportive - not just for residents, but for the staff facilitating the activity as well.

Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide:

Evidence-based activities for older adults

How to use this resource?

Designed for flexible use to suit a variety of care settings and user preferences.

- Choose the format that works for you:
 - Use the digital guide with hyperlinks to activities
 - Print individual activity pages as needed
 - Print the full guide for shared spaces
 - Create activity kits for quick, grab-and-go use.
- Integrate into existing workflows:
 - Embed into volunteer orientation and training
 - Align with organizational programs (e.g. HELP or similar engagement initiatives)
 - Adapt temporarily

So many practical ideas!



- This resource is designed for flexible use, so it can be adapted to different care settings, workflows, and user preferences.
- As indicated earlier, the digital format, includes a clickable table of contents, making it easy to navigate and access activities quickly. This is ideal for staff who are comfortable using tablets, computers, or other digital devices during care routines.
- Printed options: Print individual activity pages as needed, selecting activities based on the person's interests or a specific theme.
- Print the full guide to create a shared binder for team spaces, making it accessible to everyone on the care team.
- Create activity kits by assembling printed instructions with all required materials in labeled bags or bins. These grab-and-go kits save time and make meaningful engagement quick and easy to implement, even during busy shifts.
- The resource can be integrated into existing workflows:
 - Include it in volunteer orientation and training so new team members feel confident facilitating activities.
 - Align activities with organizational programs, such as HELP or other engagement initiatives, to ensure consistency and maximize impact.

- Engage teams completing one to one observations, on modified work, students, family care partners
- The guide is not meant to create extra work - it's designed to make meaningful engagement easier, more efficient, and more person-centred for both staff and residents.
- Ultimately, the approach chosen - digital, printed, or kit format - should fit the environment, staff workflow, and individual needs of the people being supported.

Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide:

Evidence-based activities for older adults

Implementation

- Use the guide as a **proactive, flexible tool** to support meaningful engagement
- Focus on **small, realistic actions** that fit daily roles and routines
- Approach implementation as a **team effort**, adapting to your setting and resources
- Identify **team champions and leadership support** to build momentum
- **Recognize and celebrate successes** that create connection, calm, and joy



We've discussed what's in the guide and how it was created. The next question is:

What does implementation look like for the team?

This guide is meant to be a **proactive tool**. Research shows that meaningful engagement plays a key role in supporting positive behaviour. By keeping individuals meaningfully engaged in activities that reflect their interests, teams can reduce challenges and save time in the long run.

The guide is also designed to be **flexible**. Engagement doesn't need to be complicated or time-consuming. It's about finding realistic ways to contribute within your role, capacity, and daily routines. Meaningful engagement is a **team effort**.

Even **small actions** can create moments of stimulation, connection, joy, and purpose for the people we support. These moments matter.

A key step in implementation is **knowing your resources**. Identify champions on your team—people who are willing to review the guide, try it out, and support others. Not everyone will buy in right away, and that's okay. Hearing from a trusted team lead or colleague who experiences positive results can help build momentum. Start by asking yourself: *who could be that champion or champions on the team?*

It's also important to **acknowledge and recognize** team members who are embracing this approach. Their efforts contribute to better outcomes and reduce reliance on less effective practices.

Take time to **celebrate successes**—those moments of calm, connection, or joy that come from meaningful engagement.

Finally, **embrace the resource**. Keep encouraging champions and team leads to model and promote its use so that meaningful engagement becomes part of everyday practice and team culture.

Considerations for Implementation Across Sectors

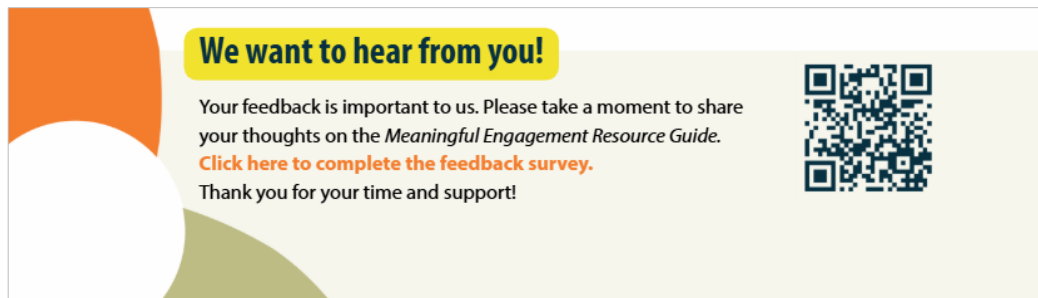
- Adapt the guide to fit your setting and available resources
- Identify champions such as team leads, educators, or direct support staff
- Ensure leadership support and open communication
- Start small and build gradually
- Promote awareness so all team members know the guide exists and can contribute

Meaningful Engagement Resource Guide:

Evidence-based activities for older adults

Feedback Form:

- Encourage your team to provide feedback.
- Collecting this feedback is important to ensure the tool remains relevant, effective, and continuously improved to meet the needs of users.
- Click on the digital link or use the QR code to complete the survey – found on page #2 of the resource guide.



- At the bottom of the Table of Contents, there is a feedback survey designed to gather input from everyone using the resource guide.
- The survey invites users to share:
 - Who is using the guide.
 - Where it's being used most often—for example, which sector or care setting.
 - How it's being used—whether digitally, printed, in activity kits, or in other innovative ways that may not have been anticipated.
- Users are also encouraged to share:
 - Positive experiences or success stories.
 - Which activities have been most helpful.
 - Areas for improvement or gaps that could inform future revisions of the guide.
- Feedback is essential to strengthening and evolving this resource. Taking just a few minutes to complete the survey helps ensure the guide continues to meet the needs of individuals and those they support.
- The goal is to create a living resource that improves over time, based on real-world use and input from everyone implementing these strategies.



Behavioural Supports Ontario
Soutien en cas des troubles du comportement en Ontario

Contact us



brainxchange.ca/BSO



provincialBSO@nbrhc.on.ca



+1 (855) 276-6313



[BSO Provincial Coordinating Office](#)
