

## **EDEN™ ALTERNATIVE PHILOSOPHY AND HOW TO INCORPORATE IT DAILY** **Annie L. Bumgarner, CTRS, CEA**

Activity Professionals have the passion to teach about living and how to successfully grow old. Eden advocates know all that already. Let's incorporate new thinking and be a part of the culture change.

### **WHAT IS EDEN?**

The Eden Alternative was developed by Dr. William Thomas, a board-certified geriatrician, who recognized the need to change how we think about elder care. The Eden philosophy directs energy towards quality of life for elders and staff. Eden focuses on relationships and connectivity from the heart that enriches the lives of both elders and staff.

There are 10 Eden Alternative Principles. Here are three of the Principles.

1. The three plagues of loneliness, helplessness, and boredom account for the bulk of the suffering among our elders.
2. Meaningless activity corrodes the human spirit. The opportunity to do things that we find meaningful is essential to human health.
3. Creating an elder-centered community is a never-ending process. Human growth must never be separated from human life.

### **NEW WAYS OF THINKING**

✓ Any activity is possible, but evaluate the intent. Does the activity allow for growth or busywork? ✓ Quality of life is supported for elders, staff, and all others involved. ✓ Invite change everywhere. ✓ Change terminology (i.e., use team instead of departments). ✓ Create a new atmosphere. ✓ Be authentic and open to change and growth. ✓ Invite spontaneity. ✓ Initiate an unplanned activity, ignite laughter, and watch boredom disappear. ✓ Leave items such as a puzzle on a table, cards, art supplies out to increase spontaneity. ✓ Always ask, are you part of the problem or solution?

### **ACTIVITY IDEAS**

#### **Neighborhoods**

- Develop names and signs for each hallway. Allow elders to pick names and vote.
- Create neighborhood associations that offer activities. ■ Invite other neighborhoods to activities.
- Have committees that consist of all staff members and elders in that neighborhood.

#### **Learning Circle™**

Circles provide energy and acknowledge elders, staff, etc. Twenty is a good number. Create more circles, if needed.

Select questions to ask (see the following examples using gardening metaphors) and provide a set amount of time to answer. A person may pass and respond later.

- ✓ If you don't plant seeds, do you wait for a garden? ✓ If you plant tomato seeds, do you expect radishes to grow?
- ✓ Once planting is done, do you walk away providing no more care? ✓ Do seasons provide any purpose? ✓ How do you tend to a garden? ✓ Does a relationship need to be formed between the garden and gardener? ✓ How does caring help everything grow? ✓ Are you being tended to?
- ✓ What is it like being a staff or elder in your garden?

#### **Resident Meetings**

- Begin with a Learning Circle to create an interest and a voice for everyone.
- Form committees to address problem-solving (i.e., food, activities, welcoming).
- Explore these Eden definitions: Loneliness is the pain we feel when we want but cannot have companionship. Helplessness is the pain we feel when we always receive care and never give care. Boredom is the pain we feel when our lives lack variety and spontaneity.

### **Have LIFE Everywhere in Any Form**

- Have plants, animals, children, and family members to promote the home-like atmosphere.
- Display items such as pictures and personal collections of the elders and staff that will stimulate conversation and memories.
- Provide activities that stimulate the five senses (touch, hearing, seeing, taste, and smell).
- Promote laughter to release endorphins. Advocate joy and the release of serotonin.

### **Teaching about Our Hearts**

- Have an activity to identify heart phrases (i.e., heart quest, change of heart, be in harmony with your heart).
- Play occurs when we quiet our minds and enjoy being.
- Compassion is being in harmony with our hearts.
- Our hearts teach us about intuition and love.

### **Exercise Programs**

- Do exercises that promote maintaining ADL's.
- Strengthen core muscle groups.
- Teach the importance of hydration.
- Teach the body and mind connection.

### **Cooking Together**

- Make the elders' and staffs' favorite recipes.
- Discover the histories of the favorite recipes (i.e., when, with whom, how the table was prepared, special holiday).

### **Spirituality**

- Promote healing through alternatives.
- Recite favorite Bible verses.
- Sing comforting songs.

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