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## OBJECTIVES:

- By the end of the session, participants will be able to:
  - Understand the current long-term care engagement landscape and real staffing challenges.
  - Strengthen personal well-being with on shift self-compassion practices.
  - Apply asset-based thinking to shift from “what’s missing” to “what we do have.”
  - Use practical, no-prep engagement strategies that can be implemented by anyone in the building.
  - Leverage technology and peer leadership without adding to workload.

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## STAFFING AND BURNOUT

- **78% of long-term care communities** reported **recreation staff shortages** in 2022.  
(Source: *National Center for Assisted Living*, 2022)
- **46% of Recreation Therapists** and **58% of Activity Professionals** reported increased workload with fewer team members after COVID-19 staffing shifts.  
(Source: *National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification (NCTRC)* survey, 2022)
- Staff shortages in long-term care facilities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to increased burnout among healthcare workers. Burnout can compromise the quality of care and lead to **higher turnover rates**.
- Recreation and activity professionals were **over 2.5 times more likely** to report experiencing “compassion fatigue” when regular engagement programming was disrupted.  
(Source: *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 2021)



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## TODAY'S LTC ENGAGEMENT LANDSCAPE

Average recreation staff to resident ratio: 1 to 60+ residents (anecdotally reported)

50%+ of LTCs use contract staff as of 2022, disrupting continuity

Up to 60% of RTs/Aps cover multiple floors or entire buildings

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ONE IN EVERY  
EIGHT PEOPLE IN  
THE WORLD  
SUFFERS FROM A  
MENTAL ILLNESS.

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## But Are 7 In 8 Mentally Healthy?

### Take A Moment To Ask Yourself:

- Do You Realize Your Own Potential?
- Are You Able To Cope With Everyday Stressors?
- Do You Feel Satisfied And Optimistic About Life?
- Many of us struggle to maintain mental well-being although we may not suffer from a mental disorder. Mental health goes way beyond the absence of flaws and includes multiple factors including life satisfaction, positive well-being, and vitality.

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## SELF CARE LIFE BALANCE

### PHYSICAL

- Daily movement or light exercise
- Balanced meals & hydration
- Adequate rest & naps
- Limit screen strain
- Stay current with medical care

### PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Practice mindfulness
- Pursue creative outlets
- Positive self-talk
- Read or listen to uplifting content
- Reflect on daily wins

### PROFESSIONAL

- Set work boundaries
- Take breaks during shifts
- Use vacation days
- Ask for help when needed
- Celebrate team successes

### EMOTIONAL

- Acknowledge feelings
- Laugh daily
- Seek supportive conversations
- Practice self-compassion
- Engage in comforting activities

### PERSONAL

- Stay connected with friends/family
- Say no without guilt
- Engage in hobbies
- Plan fun or relaxation time
- Pursue personal growth

### SPIRITUAL

- Spend time in nature
- Practice gratitude
- Meditation or prayer
- Acts of kindness
- Explore purpose and meaning

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## COMPASSION FATIGUE IN RECREATION THERAPY

- Compassion fatigue is a state of emotional and physical exhaustion resulting from prolonged exposure to the suffering and needs of others, leading to a diminished capacity to empathize or feel compassion. It's often referred to as the "cost of caring" for those in helping professions.
- A study examining Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists (CTRSs) found that while many reported high levels of compassion satisfaction, there were also notable levels of burnout and secondary traumatic stress, indicating the presence of compassion fatigue in the profession.

Wozencroft et al. (2019). *Professional quality of life in RTs*. *TRJ*, 53(1), 22–36. [doi.org/10.18666/TRJ-2019-V53-I1-9098](https://doi.org/10.18666/TRJ-2019-V53-I1-9098)

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## Understanding Compassion Fatigue

### Signs & Symptoms of Compassion Fatigue

**COMPASSION**  
(noun):  
shared feelings and  
the desire to alleviate  
suffering

**FATIGUE**  
(noun):  
The decreased capacity  
or inability to function  
normally due to  
excessive stimulation  
or exertion

**COMPASSION FATIGUE**  
(noun):  
Gradual decline in  
compassion toward  
others and self due to  
excessive stimulation or  
trauma exposure.

#### Physical

Exhaustion  
Sleep Problems  
Migraines  
Immunodeficiency  
Muscle Tension

#### Behavioral

Substance Use Increase  
Anger & Irritability  
Self-blame  
Impaired decision-  
making  
Forgetfulness  
Difficulty with Intimacy  
Difficulty separating  
personal from  
professional life

#### Psychological

Guilt  
Depression  
Loss of Hope  
Decreased Empathy  
Cynicism  
Dread of Work  
Anxiety  
Numbness  
Hypervigilance  
Change in Worldview  
Survivor Guilt  
Self-criticism

\*Each individual clinician has unique signs and symptoms of moving into compassion fatigue. Learn your signs and develop prevention strategies to build resilience!

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## WHAT IS SELF - COMPASSION

Self-compassion is a mindset and practice of treating oneself with kindness, understanding, and acceptance, especially during times of difficulty, failure, or suffering.

It involves three key components:

Self-kindness

Common humanity

Mindfulness

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## SELF-COMPASSION PRACTICE – I-MINUTE SELF-COMPASSION RESET

### The Hand-on-Heart Grounding Practice

- Place your hand gently on your heart. Take a deep breath. Say silently: "This is a hard moment. Others feel this way too. I am not alone." "I am doing the best I can with what I have today."

### The Soothing Breath Pause

- Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 2, exhale slowly. Say to yourself: "Inhale calm. Exhale judgment." "Each breath is a reset."

### The Mirror Mantra

- As you pass by a mirror or reflection: "You care deeply. That's what makes this hard." "You are allowed to be both tired and kind."

### The Shift Reset

- Between visits or groups, pause and say: "This shift does not have to be perfect to be meaningful." "Small moments matter most."

### The Shared Humanity Reminder

- As you wash your hands or walk a hallway: "Being human means sometimes I get overwhelmed." "Others in this community feel this too. I'm not alone."

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**Link:**  
<https://positivepsychology.com/self-compassion-scale/>

### HOW I TYPICALLY ACT TOWARDS MYSELF IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Please read each statement carefully before answering. To the left of each item, indicate how often you behave in the stated manner, using the following scale:

Almost never 1	2	3	4	Almost always 5	
_____					
	1.	I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.			
_____					
	2.	When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.			
_____					
	3.	When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through.			
_____					
	4.	When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world.			
_____					
	5.	I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain.			
_____					
	6.	When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.			
_____					
	7.	When I'm down and out, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.			
_____					
	8.	When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself.			
_____					
	9.	When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.			
_____					
	10.	When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.			

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## Preventing Compassion Fatigue

**Engage in Regular Self-Care:** Prioritize activities that rejuvenate you physically, emotionally and mentally.

**Set Healthy Boundaries:** Learn to say "no" when necessary to maintain work-life balance.

**Seek Support:** Connect with colleagues, mentors, or counselors regularly.

**Practice Mindfulness:** Incorporate meditation, deep-breathing, or grounding exercises into your day.

**Maintain a Healthy Lifestyle:** Ensure consistent sleep, nutritious meals, and regular exercise.

**Engage in Hobbies:** Pursue creative or fun activities outside of work.

**Educate Yourself:** Stay informed about compassion fatigue its signs, and coping strategies.

**Reflect Regularly:** Use journaling to process work experiences and emotions.

**Celebrate Small Wins:** Acknowledge and appreciate even small daily accomplishments.

**Take Breaks:** Allow yourself short, regular mental and physical breaks during shifts.

(Source: Adapted from Wozencroft, Scott & Waller, Therapeutic Recreation Journal, 2019; National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification, 2022)

**You can't pour from an empty cup. Protect your well-being to keep making a difference.**

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## WHY RECREATION AND ACTIVITY MATTER MORE THAN EVER

■ *Institute for Healthcare Improvement; Beach et al., 2006, Annals of Family Medicine*

■ *Creativity Under Pressure: Studies (like those by Harvard Business Review) show teams perform better when they are given permission to innovate and adapt.*

■ *The Gerontologist, 2021; CMS F679 Guidelines, 2020*

- Residents with daily recreational engagement have 25% fewer behavioral incidents.
  - *Person-Centered Care in Crisis:* Research shows that small gestures of meaningful engagement (e.g., brief music moments, validation techniques) improve mood and reduce agitation even when staff time is limited.
- Consistent activity programming lowers depression rates by 22–25% among nursing home residents.
- Recreation and activity professionals play a critical role in resident satisfaction and regulatory compliance (CMS Guidelines, F-Tag 679: Activities).

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## WHY RECREATION AND ACTIVITY MATTER MORE THAN EVER

■ Relationship-centered care (RCC) is an approach to healthcare that emphasizes the importance of human relationships — not just between staff and residents, but also among team members and with families. It moves beyond task completion ("Did we finish the bath, the meds, the charting?") to focus on the quality of the interactions that happen during those tasks.

■ In a Relationship-Centered Care Team, every team member — recreation therapist, nurse, aide, dining server, maintenance staff — sees connection as part of their job, not just clinical duties or tasks.

■ Key principles of Relationship-Centered Care:

- Every interaction matters
- Relationships are therapeutic
- Team members care for each other
- Residents are active participants, not passive recipients of care.

*Institute for Healthcare Improvement; Beach et al., 2006, Annals of Family Medicine*

*Creativity Under Pressure: Studies (like those by Harvard Business Review) show teams perform better when they are given permission to innovate and adapt.*

*The Gerontologist, 2021; CMS F679 Guidelines, 2020*

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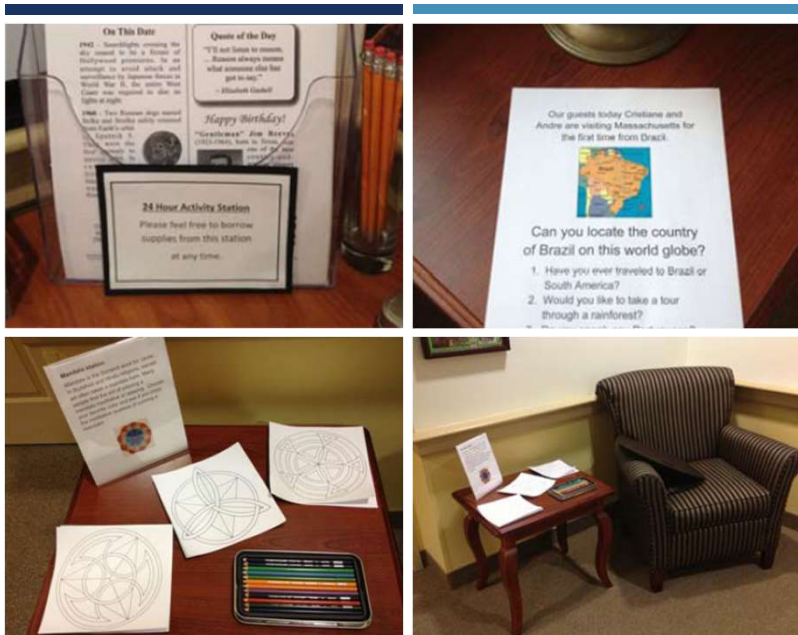


## EXAMPLE OF A RELATIONSHIP- CENTERED CARE TEAM IN ACTION

- Scenario: Recreation Therapy in a Nursing Home
- Without Relationship-Centered Care:
  - Recreation staff lead the morning trivia.
  - Nursing aides only come to "pull" residents away quickly for meds.
  - Dining staff deliver trays silently without acknowledging residents.

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## SHIFT THE MINDSET

- Asset-based thinking: Start with what you do have (residents' skills, family, **environment**)
- Inspirational Stations
- Activity kits
  - How do we maintain when we are already staff challenged?

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## SHIFT THE MINDSET

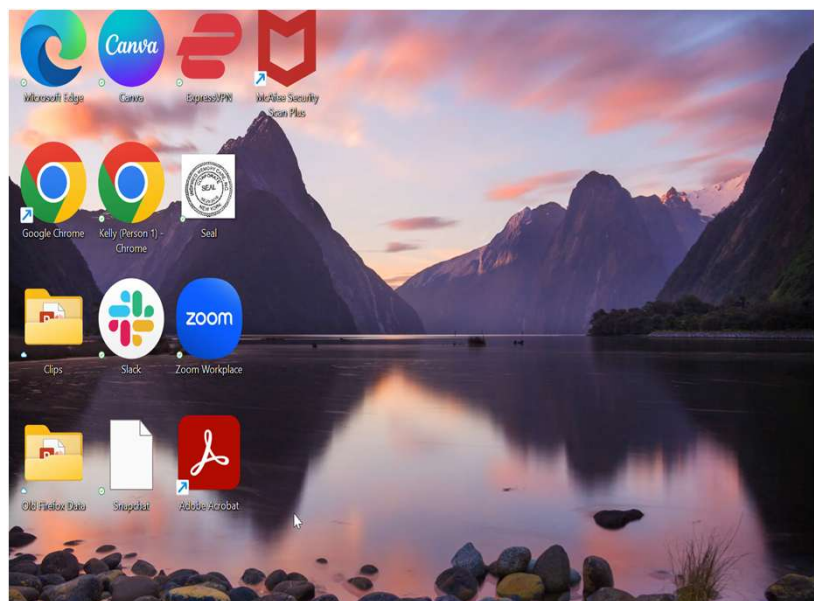
- Use Structured, Repetitive Frameworks for Engagement
  - Routine-Based Scheduling: Assign specific types of programs to specific days or times (e.g., “Music Mondays” or “Creative Corners”) to reduce daily planning time.
    - Routine taps into their procedural memory
      - Less time spent reminding residents
      - Less time escorting
- Optimize Group Sizes and Peer Leaders
  - Small Group Rotation Model, Parallel Programming: Instead of one large group, rotate residents through 3 small groups using different stations—more engaging, easier to manage, and lowers distressing behaviors

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## SHIFT THE MINDSET

- Asset-based thinking: Start with what you *do* have (residents’ skills, family, **environment**)
- Online Programs and Resources



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## SHIFT THE MINDSET

- Asset-based thinking: Start with what you *do* have (**residents' skills**, family, environment)
  - Talents (e.g., former teacher leads a spelling bee)
- Resident-led or co-led programs (peer-to-peer engagement)
  - (e.g., Gospel Hour led by retired choir director)



**Tip:** Recruit peer leaders and pair them with volunteers or new staff for onboarding moments.

<https://www.theconnectapp.com/>

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## SHIFT THE MINDSET

- Asset-based thinking: Start with what you *do* have (residents' skills, **family**, environment)



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## NO PREP TIME, NO PROBLEM-LEARNING AND DISCUSSION

Downtime

I:I visits with  
volunteers  
and families

Small group  
connection

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THE  
SOUND  
OF MUSIC

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Julie Andrews kept falling over during the mountain scene. The helicopter kept knocking Andrews over. She said, "This was a jet helicopter and the down draft from the opening scene of Julie Andrews twirling on the mountain top may look effortless, but it was just about to give up on something they have been working hard for?"

It was raining and cold throughout production. And I mean flattened. It was fine for a couple of takes, but after that you begin to get just a little bit angry... And I really tried. I mean, I braced myself, I thought, "It's not going to get me this time." And every single time, I bit the dust."

## THE SOUND OF MUSIC



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## PABLO PICASSO

- Picasso is best known by his last name; however, did you know his full name is 25 words long?
- His full name is Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad Mártir Patricio Clito Ruiz y Picasso

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## PABLO PICASSO

- Picasso's first word was 'lapiz', which is Spanish for pencil
- Have you ever wanted to follow in your parents' footsteps when it came to selecting a career?
- Picasso's father also worked as a painter; it was expected that art would be in Picasso's blood and his first word merely proved that fact.
- Picasso's father specialized in naturalistic paintings of birds. He began teaching Picasso to create artistic works from the age of seven

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LET'S DANCE  
AND SING!



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## SMALL EFFORT, BIG IMPACT

- 5-Minute Engagements: Micro-moments of connection. (Ex: Hand massage, personalized music for 5 min, reading one poem aloud.)
  - Play a song that is current, Invite to stand up and dance
- Visual Communication Boards: Use simple boards to update residents and reduce repetitive questions.
- "Task Plus One" Model: Do one task (e.g., Pass out the mail or newspaper) + one small engagement (e.g., bring with you a playlist, more engaging and will capture more residents interest and you might actually "cause" a dance party).

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## QUICK ENGAGEMENT TOOLS FOR SHORT-STAFFED DAYS

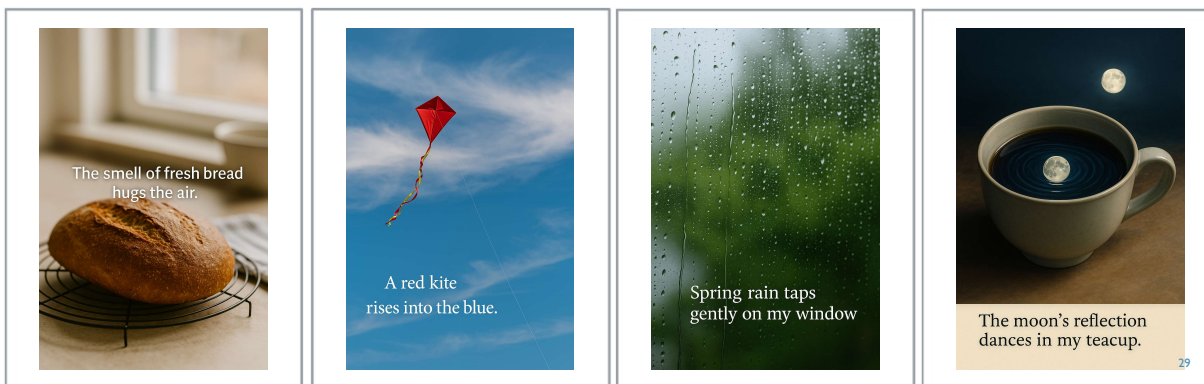
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 10 Micro-Engagements:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Hand massage</li> <li>■ Read aloud a poem</li> <li>■ Dance/Sway to one song</li> <li>■ What's your opinion on this art print?</li> <li>■ Comment on a photo in the room or painting in the hallway</li> <li>■ Water a plant together</li> <li>■ Fold towels or napkins</li> <li>■ Watch a short funny video clip</li> <li>■ Sing the chorus of a familiar song together</li> <li>■ Smell a flower from the garden</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Conversation Starters:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What do you think of this music?</li> <li>■ What's the best sound in the world?</li> <li>■ What's the best smell in the world?</li> <li>■ Would you ever go on a hot air balloon?</li> <li>■ What's your opinion on naps?</li> <li>■ Which is better cake or pie?</li> <li>■ Which do you prefer sunrise or sunset?</li> <li>■ What's the tastiest fruit?</li> <li>■ Which is better tea or coffee?</li> <li>■ If you can be any age for a week, what age would you be?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
|--|---|

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## PREPPED ONE-LINE POEMS



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## TECHNOLOGY

- Alexa routines: Pre-program to perform a series of actions with one voice command or at a scheduled time:
  - Joke of the Day
  - Programed Music Hours
  - Story Mode: Alexa can read interactive stories aloud. Residents can listen together or individually.
- The Echo Show for photo-based engagement
  - Invite families to share photos of their family member
  - Create looping slideshows
- YouTube playlist use
  - Stretch breaks
  - Music-based engagement
  - Art Viewing
- The above are all opportunities that can be added into the rhythm of the day
  - During morning rounds
  - When closing a program
  - When a CNA is supporting safety in the common space instead of the TV playing
  - A Volunteer is available

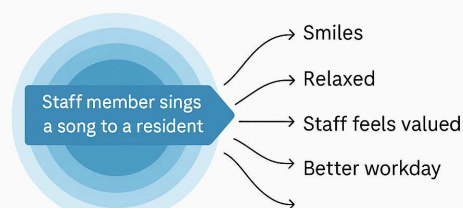
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## “RIPPLE EFFECT”

### The Engagement Ripple Effect



■ Staff member gives hand massage → Resident smiles → Less agitation during lunch → Eats more → Feels content → Staff shift improves

**One Song. One Poem. One Shared Laugh.** These create ripples that transform a day, for residents and for YOU.

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## SMALL EFFORT, BIG IMPACT

Gratitude Huddles: 2-minute team huddle daily to share a "what went well" story.

Examples: doorway dance parties, themed days using minimal setup

Positive engagement opportunities (even brief ones) have been shown to reduce agitation by up to 30% and decrease depressive symptoms by 25% among long-term care residents.

(Source: *The Gerontologist*, 2021)

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You arrive at work and you have two assistants that have called out. How do you prioritize engagement?  
What are some quick action plans you can take?

Rapid idea Generation:  
How do you still add small moments of joy without those team members?

Reframe: “everyone is a caregiver/care partner” and “everyone is an engager”









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<p>💡 If you could only eat Italian or Mexican food for the rest of your life, which would you pick?</p>	<p>💡 If you could have dinner with any famous person, living or not, who would it be?</p>	<p>💡 Would you ever eat alligator?</p>
<p>💡 Are you more of a sweet tooth or a salty snack person?</p> <p style="font-size: small; margin-top: 10px;">COPYRIGHT (C) 2025 BY INSPIRED MEMORY CARE (IMC)</p>	<p>💡 What is one food you would never give up?</p>	<p>💡 If you could invent an ice cream flavor, what would it be called?</p>

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 <b>POCKET GUIDE: Five Minute Engagements for Busy Teams!</b>		
Category	Action	Example
 Chat	Ask a memory-triggering question (without asking “Do you remember?”)	“Would you ever travel to a foreign place?”
 Music	Play or Sing a Favorite Song	“Let’s hear some Beatles music!”
 Relaxation	Lead a stretch break	“Let’s see how high we can reach!”
 Humor	Share a joke or riddle of the day	“I speak without a mouth and hear without ears. I have no body, but I come alive with wind. What am I?” (Answer: An Echo)
 Creative	Offer a short creative task	“Can you help me pick the color for this month’s bulletin board?”
 Sensory	Share a scent, texture, or warmth	Share some lavender hand lotion, or ask an opinion on your favorite fragrance
 Read	Share a short poem or fun fact	“Did you know that the world’s oldest cat lived to 38 years old?”

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## TOOLS, TIPS AND TEAM BOOSTERS

### Systems Save Time

- Scheduling the calendar in cycles: “repeatable favorites” with seasonal tweaks
- Create shared templates for bulletin boards, room visits, and quick-check programming
- Digital support (preloaded tablets, Alexa routines, family-recorded messages)

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### BUILD MORALE, BUILD MOMENTUM

“You Matter” initiatives for staff (gratitude walls, notes from residents)

Peer recognition with low-cost ideas



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## CREATIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## BASIC RESOURCE LIST



Tap into virtual volunteers, high school and college interns



Intergenerational programming that supports staff relief



Pre-recorded or scheduled guest programs from libraries, musicians, or museums

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## Q & A AND INTERACTIVE WRAP-UP




10-minute brainstorm session



“Work smarter” tip you’ve used—or want to try


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