

Tips and considerations for “getting outside safely” for persons with dementia, and dementia-friendly programs: A three-pronged approach

1) Enhance home-based programming

Some may not feel comfortable joining in outdoor group programs for quite a while, or until there is a vaccine available. Is there a way to enhance the virtual programs that are already happening? For example, the Garden Discovery Walks program typically combines social activity + physical activity + nature engagement. In its virtual form, we have chosen to focus on the nature engagement goal, through a video. However, there’s no social or physical element. Can we enhance the experience?

- Can we add a social element? Can people post photos of their nature-based activity to a group Facebook page? Can they have a “GDW buddy” who they write a weekly postcard to about the favorite tree or plant they can see in their yard or on a walk down the block? Can the nature-based activity itself have a social element – creating a bouquet for a neighbor, for example?

Conversely, we’ve seen the rise of a lot of purely social virtual groups – Zoom-based support groups and Memory Cafes, for example. The Memory Loss Zoo Walk here in Seattle is having weekly coffee chats on Zoom.

- Is there a way to infuse more nature, or physical activity, into these groups? Can we encourage people to join the Zoom call from their front porch while they sit in the sun? Can we all do a walk down the block before the call, and then “share” a photo of a beautiful plant or tree that we discovered?

Lastly, some people have been doing virtual exercise programs from home, like chair exercise or Zumba. Is there a way to make that happen safely outside – in the yard or park? Can videos be made the show incorporating natural elements into the workout – stretching by leaning against a tree, for example? Doing arm dips on a park bench (with reminders about hand washing afterward)?

2) Explore “safer” group-based programs – When public health guidelines allow, and for those who feel comfortable...

Consider, what outdoor activities naturally lend themselves to physical distance? (The goal being to remove the cognitive burden of having to always think about, or remind about, about staying apart).

- Tai chi? Outdoor yoga? Line dancing or other individual dances? Cycling? Watersports like kayaking? Tennis or outdoor ping pong? Perhaps walking or hiking?

Consider, what outdoor activities, with some slight modifications, could be adapted to incorporate natural physical distance? Use *time* or use *space* to separate people. To separate using time, can you hike on a one-way route where everyone comes with a partner and you space out the start time just a bit? To create separation using physical space, consider what are tangible, visible reminders that naturally enforce physical distance. For example, hiking/walking:

- Walk around a track and have everyone stay in their lanes?
- Use a rope knotted every 6 feet for people to hold onto and be spaced apart?
- Can we make creative use of natural barriers – hedges, fences, tree lines, etc – to provide physical distance?
- Can we do a caravan group *drive* of a scenic roadway, rather than a walk?

3) Consider, and advocate for, community-based solutions for getting outside safely

What are policies or approaches that can make it safer for all older adults, or persons with dementia, to get outside?

- Senior hours at the park, or on the trails?
- Marked off 6-foot distances in parks or trails?
- Close down streets for walking/biking? (Stay Healthy Streets in Seattle)