

Confusion

- When Cathy becomes confused, losing sense of time and place, she calls someone to get that information. This is time consuming for those she contacts and leaves her with outrageous phone bills.
- My daughter will not get into the bathtub. She says it is too deep and she will not be able to get out.
- Dad tells us amazing stories of being chased, poisoned, even meeting aliens all within the course of his day. I know he has not left the house and we are his only visitors. I finally realized he was recounting what he had seen on TV, as if it were his life.
- David has a terrible time entering the cafeteria. He thinks the dark colored tiles on the checker-board floor are holes he will step into.
- Steve could not find his way back inside when he went in the yard to work in his garden. He would just walk around and around the house until he became so tired he had to sit down and rest.
- Betty refused to deliver the inter-office mail to one section of the building. She insisted that every time she walked down that hallway someone was following her. We discovered, after going with her, that it was only her shadow. We increased the lighting in the hallway and the 'someone' disappeared.
- Stan is capable of completing his payroll responsibilities at work, but can't remember WHEN to do them. When finally reminded, it's too late for him to complete the job on time.
- Aunt Gertie forgets to take her medicine or takes it too often. Until she got her medication leveled out and back on track, she was unsteady on her feet and so confused that we thought she could no longer live alone safely.
- I've stopped getting together with friends and even family because I feel so sad and embarrassed when I can't remember the names of even those dearest to me.

Assistive technology solutions are available for individuals who have disorientation, misinterpretation and confusion difficulties. These solutions can provide information about time and place, decrease the likelihood of mixing reality with fantasy and allow individuals to continue participating in activities they enjoy and those that are necessary for living. Some of the assistive technology devices have been designed especially for meeting these unique needs; others

are typical items used differently.

Reminder Aids

We all use devices to keep us on track and on time, but reminder aids can go beyond organization to assist with judgment and reasoning. When the ability to recognize or remember the correct day of the week or time of the day is impaired and inappropriate actions result, the employment of devices and strategies can be helpful.

Posting calendars, hanging clocks, and providing wrist watches are easy first steps. Note activities to be remembered on corresponding dates, set watches and alarm clocks to trigger appropriate responses, i.e., time to watch a soap opera, take a pill, or meet a friend. If reading a clock with hands is troublesome, change to one with a digital readout. When that is not effective, consider using a **Talking Clock** or **Talking Calendar**. These devices will announce the time of day and date aloud with the push of a button and can be accessed as many times as the individual feels the need for the information. For those needing reminders across environments, **Talking Watches** with date and time features are also available.

Reminder aids of more complexity are those that use specially designed telephones and telephone services. The **Main Street Messenger** is one such telephone system allowing the user to program four daily reminder alerts. At preset times, a tone sounds and the reminder key flashes to nudge the user to do whatever is needed, i.e., take medication, go to an appointment, exercise, or feed the cat. As well, this telephone system features a cordless emergency response pendant, speakerphone, automatic alert dialing, and single button memory. These features assist with thinking skills while allowing the individual safety and autonomy.

Bathroom Aids

There are a variety of ways to alter the bathroom environment to decrease confusion and fears. Carpet placed on the floor, towels on bars or racks and curtains on the windows absorb troublesome splashing water sounds. If that is not enough, consider installing sink and bathtub cascading faucets that don't splash, but rather slide the water into the tub or sink (available at local plumbing supply or home improvement stores). Help define the tub by placing light colored mats in dark tubs, and dark colored mats in light tubs to identify the bottom of the tub and bring it closer. Install grab bars that allow an individual to control their rate of descent and provide something to hold when standing, sitting or climbing in and out of the tub or on and off the commode. Let the individual start in a dry tub and have the water fill while sitting, or install a bathtub seat and hand-held showerhead. This allows the individual to control the on/off and pause water features. Another option may be giving an individual a bath in bed, using an inflatable bathtub such as the **E-Z Bath**. The individual rolls on their side, allowing the inflatable tub to be placed under them. A special wet/dry

vacuum cleaner (provided by the company) inflates the tub walls. Hoses run from the inflatable tub to the bathroom for water and drainage. Ordinary garden hoses can be used to extend the lines if the bathroom is far away.

Environmental Aids

To make environments clear and friendly, check lighting. Increase lighting or use torch lamps to reduce or eliminate shadows. Leave lights on in dark areas and use nightlights and touch lamps for ready light access. Consider installing a **Light Lamp Control**. These devices fit between the plug and the outlet and make it possible to turn the light on or off by simply touching any metallic part of the lamp or cord. Some touch switches have a remote pad that you can place elsewhere to turn on the light. As well, install motion detector night lights, motion detecting wall switches, or motion detector lamp adapters which automatically turn on lights and lamps based on the movements of an individual. There is also a voice operated light switch which will turn on the light with just a vocalization.

Television can be a source of misinterpretation. Sometimes substituting a black and white picture for color is helpful. This can be done by using a black and white TV or adjusting the color control knob or color control menu item all the way down on a standard colored TV. Television and radio voices can also be confusing. Use headphones that plug into the TV or radio, and radio headphones or wireless personal listening devices for televisions to listen privately. Another solution is to use the closed captioning feature built into all TVs manufactured after 1993, which supports the auditory information with written script.

Locating Aids

There are a number of devices and strategies available to assist individuals who become disoriented and lost. A solution can be as simple as placing appropriate cues where they will serve a purpose i.e., photographs of family members on their bedroom doors. Having the individual wear a medical alert bracelet which provides the number of someone who can either relay to the caller where the individual lives or be able to meet the caller and then bring the individual to their destination. Teaching individuals to use the in-store Help Phones or mall information centers and kiosks to obtain the information they need is a ready solution.

Programming a small electronic device such as the **Voice Diary** with phone numbers, directions, reaffirming messages or next steps for individuals allows portability and independence. **Global Positioning Systems (GPS)** are also available which can track an individual's location anywhere on the planet. These hand-held devices receive signals from a navigation system that uses tracking satellites to determine location. A range of GPSs are available from those with simple tracking capabilities to those which supply specific positioning information and have wireless email capabilities. These devices help keep an

individual on track and provide a means to locate them should they get off-track.

Things you can do to make life less confusing

- Paint door trims along hallways in contrasting colors to make identification easier; bathroom trim blue, bedroom trim yellow, etc.
- Place a poster with a seasonal scene on the back of the front door to serve as a reminder of what type of clothing might be necessary before leaving
- Change alternating dark tiles with water-proof paint or contact paper which may be removed later without damaging the floor
- When mirrors present difficulties, remove them, place something in front of them, turn them around, or cover them with contact paper or water-based tempera paint
- Put a sign on the front door “Brenda’s House” or use items at the doorway that attract the individual (bright red geraniums in pots, gold lions) to help signal home
- Keep wall paper patterns, rug patterns and color schemes conventional; avoid designs with flowers or figures that an individual may want to pick or talk to
- Increase lighting in shadowed areas such as closets, showers
- Trim outside bushes and light walkways to eliminate places where someone “could be hiding”
- Create maps to use in and outside the home
- Use clear shower curtains
- Place benches or chairs next to outside doorways