

Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST)

We normally invite you to come to a group and meet other people who support someone with dementia. Sadly, at the time of COVID we are unable to offer groups. But we don't want you to miss out, so we are sending you this booklet which covers what we normally discuss in our group!

What is Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (CST)?

Cognitive Stimulation Therapy is a brief non-pharmacological intervention developed by Aimee Spector and colleagues (Spector et al, 2003) that has been proven to be very beneficial in people with memory impairments.

Cognitive skills are our 'thinking skills'. So CST is a therapy that works on stimulating our thinking skills, such as our memory and mental abilities.

Aims and principles

CST focuses on the individual and their strengths, rather than memory difficulties. This type of focus helps the individual engage in any activity without feeling the pressure of being tested.

The focus of CST activities is not to test the individual's memory but to increase people's active involvement in fun and pleasurable activities in a way that keeps their brain stimulated.

Why CST?

CST is proven to have positive outcomes for people with a memory illness with respect to their cognitive functioning, social interaction, self-confidence, communication and quality of life.

What does CST imply?

We normally run CST in a group setting over 14 sessions. Each session focuses on a number of fun activities such as word or number games, gentle physical games and singing. There are also discussions on different topics such as childhood, food, current affairs. We often use pictures, a soft ball, a map or fresh food to talk about.

Even if you are not attending the sessions, this handout can help you and your carer try some of the CST stimulating activities at home.

Please remember: activities are not about being right or wrong. You should focus on expressing opinions without worrying about remembering specific facts. If you are a carer, please help your loved-one to express their opinions instead of worrying about the accuracy of what they are saying.



For example, rather than asking “Who is the Prime Minister?” you can ask “What do you think of politicians?” The conversations should not test your loved-one’s memory but engage them in interesting conversations, allowing them to express their opinions and ideas. Opinions cannot be wrong!

Can I do this at home? - Yes you can!

These are examples of activities you can do at home or help your loved-ones to keep their brain active and positively stimulated:



Personal interests - Engage your loved-one in conversations that are of interest to them. For example, you could talk about current affairs or memories from childhood. Remember: it is not important to correct possible mistakes or false memories but keep the brain stimulated.



Reminiscence - Help recalling experiences from the past and link this to the present. For example, ask “What kind of holidays did you enjoy when you were younger?” and then “What do you think of holidays now?”.



Photographs - Use pictures or photographs to generate conversation. For example, use photographs of three different people and have a discussion about who is the odd one out. You can use pictures of strangers for this. Remember, there are no wrong answers!



Senses - Engage the senses using a variety of stimuli. For example, use objects to look at or touch and feel. This could be a picture to look at and talk about. You might want to go to a new or familiar place to explore. You could make something together, for example greeting cards or share baking and cooking.

The main principles when engaging in these activities are:

Encouragement:

There is evidence that with the right encouragement people with a memory illness can learn! Give the person prompts to enable them to carry out an activity themselves.

Time and pace:

Give the person more time and slow the pace down. Try not to overwhelm them with information.

Being active:

People with a memory impairment tend to do better when they are active rather than being passive.

Being creative:

Creativity is fundamental for our wellbeing and helps keeping activities fun and stimulating. You can, for example, paint, plant or bake together.

If you want to know more about CST, there are a number of books and papers:

Spector, A., Thorgrimsen, L., Woods, B & Orrel, M. (2006) Making a difference. Hawker Publications.

Woods, B. et al (2006) Improved quality of life and cognitive stimulation therapy in dementia, Aging & Mental Health 2006, 10; 3 219-226.

Yates, L. Orrel, M. & Leung, P (2014) Making a Difference: 3: Individual Cognitive Stimulation Therapy; A Manual for Carers. Hawker Publications (currently out of print — this might be available 2nd hand)

NICE (2006) Dementia: Supporting people with dementia and their carers, in health and Social Care, Clinical guideline CG42 National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.



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