

7 Art Project Ideas for Seniors Living with Dementia

Engaging in creative art projects can be beneficial for older adults, but especially for seniors living with dementia. Art can provide an alternative means of communication for those with impaired language skills, help maintain or improve fine-motor skills and hand-brain coordination, and give seniors a sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, and belonging.

Here are seven art projects to try with seniors living with cognitive decline:



#1 Sculpt with clay or wood

Sculpting with clay or wood is a unique way to engage with the creative arts. For first time sculptors, modeling clay, or kinetic sand is more approachable and easier to clean up!



#2 Paint with watercolors, oils, or pastels

The type of medium you choose should be based upon the individual's cognitive and physical abilities. Oils and watercolors are messier than pastels, markers, or crayons. The tactile experience of painting with watercolors or using pastels may be preferable, however. Try working from a still-life model if painting from a blank canvas is intimidating.



#3 Color in simple adult coloring books and pages

Adult coloring books may be a better option if a blank canvas is overwhelming. If the designs are too challenging in adult coloring books, search for books with simple designs that can be easily filled in. This is a great activity that can be done alone or done together, using separate books or different pages from the same book.



#4 Create a collage from magazines, craft paper, photos, and stickers

Working on a collage provides an opportunity to work with many different types of materials, which offer a variety of engaging textures. Incorporating family photos and articles can also help seniors living with dementia reminisce and verbalize thoughts and feelings in a way that they may struggle with. Prepare materials ahead of time, including magazines, photos, craft paper, stickers, cut-outs, and other paper craft items.



#5 Decorate cookies, cupcakes, or other baked goods

If baking is an enjoyable experience, but kitchen safety is a concern, decorating offers a great way to engage someone living with cognitive decline. Choose baked goods like cookies and cupcakes that can be individually decorated, allowing for more creative opportunities. Work together on a gingerbread house kit to spend quality time together and build on a sense of accomplishment.



#6 Put together a jigsaw puzzle

A jigsaw puzzle is a great activity to do alone or with others, which can be enjoyable for individuals with dementia. Find a puzzle with an image that may spark conversation or create moments of reminiscence, that has an approachable number of pieces for their ability and interest.



#7 Try crafting kits

Numerous crafting kits which are available today are focused on adults. Available kits include simple no-sew felt projects, wreath-making, birdhouse decorating, papercrafts, ornament creation, picture frames, and much more. Choose a kit with the appropriate ability level that will pique their interest and perhaps lead to the start of a new hobby.