



## Ida and Old Baldy's Seniors' Theatre Project

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If you are here, then you are looking for a way to have just as much fun as these ACTors who were playing at Shuswap Theatre this past fall. Glad to have you with us, and just so you know, you are part of the fastest growing theatrical phenomenon in North America. There are currently almost 1000 *registered* Seniors' Theatre groups and companies in North America and many more who are playing *unofficially*.

Researchers who are looking into the relationship between Arts and Aging, are finding what practitioners have known intuitively for a long time—that being involved in the Arts keeps us healthy.

We know that to retain our health as we age we need to:

- Stay physically active
- Stay mentally active by challenging ourselves intellectually and creatively and to continue learning new things

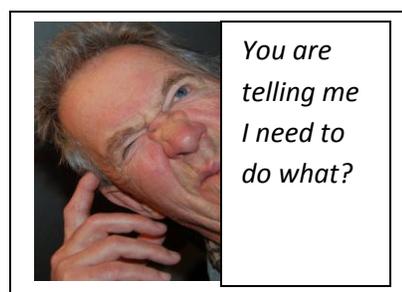
- Stay socially active and engaged and to widen our circle of acquaintances
- Stay involved in the events of our community
- Take a step or two outside our comfort zone

Seniors' Theatre groups provide opportunities to do all of these things and while the specific activities of these groups are as varied as the faces that make them up, the intention is always the same--to laugh and have fun. Check out the myriad of senior or seniors' theatre programs online and you will quickly see the power and scope of what we are doing.

Most programs are built around basic acting skills, improvisation and storytelling, readers theatre and theatre sports. For some, performance is a focus; for others, it remains an in-house activity. All programs are built around providing physical, intellectual, and social stimulation while exploring the issues we all face on a daily basis.

This handbook was developed as part of the *Ida and Old Baldy's Seniors' Theatre Project* which has been running in Salmon Arm and Sorrento, British Columbia, for the past three years. We have been funded by the Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program to create the handbook to assist other groups in developing seniors' programs of their own.

To that end, it is necessary to acknowledge that *our process will not be your process*. We learned long ago in education as well as in art, that it is impossible to tell someone how to deliver a program. Therefore, the **process** part of the handbook will be an anecdotal account of what worked and didn't work for us. Hopefully, that will be of some use to others in building effective programs.



The **games. activities and projects** section is pretty straightforward.

## *Before You Start.....*

# Personal Considerations

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There are a number of ***Personal Considerations*** which you, as facilitator, need to take into account before you venture into a program of this nature.

### **1. Your personal level of commitment to the program**

Our initial program began in Cedar Heights as the result of a request by a community member. She knew I was involved with theatre, and was enthusiastic to participate, but was reluctant to travel at night. Was there any way of having a day-time program in our community?

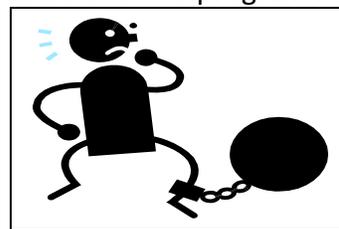
As I had worked with theatre classes in schools for many years, it seemed quite a simple transition to create an activity-based program for adults. We put a notice in newsletters and posted a few advertisements and on the opening day had a big enough turnout to play numerous theatre games and work with several improvisations. I was hooked. This was so much fun!

We shared stories, laughed at and with each other, and started to investigate some of the issues that were facing us as seniors.

It was only after the third session that I realized what had been created. It was not going to be enough to simply continue playing the same games over and over, there needed to be a whole new set of activities designed for adult players. Before long, I was spending hours preparing `lessons` and collecting materials and researching age-related issues. It continues to this day.

These are what form the basis of the ***games, activities and projects*** component of the handbook.

But be warned---unless you find a way, right from the outset to ensure that the program has shared ownership, you will find you have taken on a responsibility that may be greater than you intended. As with many programs of this nature, it can quickly become the personality of the facilitator which is the driver.



**2. How much time you have to devote to the project.**

There are a number of expressions which come into play here.....

***I never knew what busy meant until I was retired.....***

***If you want something done, ask a busy person.***

Plan on spending two hours preparing sessions, for every hour the session will last. The first time around requires the greatest preparation as you will often be trying out the activity for the first time and having to gather materials to make them work. Using the materials presented in the appendix will make the job easier.

As well, there is a significant amount of time spent promoting the activity. Whether it be setting up publicity booths at Seniors` Activity Fairs, speaking at senior or service club luncheons, writing articles for local newspapers or theatre organizations, time disappears in a hurry. No matter if you love what you are doing, it is still necessary to know what the cost is going to be.

If you are still with us, then the next couple of pages outline some of the **Program Considerations** which need to be addressed.

# Program Considerations

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By now you will have gone on-line and discovered that there are many versions of Seniors' Theatre companies. Some teach theatre skills, some teach appreciation, some are the "elder statespeople" of existing theatre companies, some are built to assist senior new Canadians in dealing with a strange culture, some are built around performance and others exist just because they exist.

Whatever you and your group have determined will be the focus of your group, there will be a number of considerations which will be constant.

## ***1. Timing and length of sessions***

Ida and Old Baldy sessions all run during mornings or afternoons to allow participants to travel in the light and when road conditions are generally better. As well, most seniors enjoy the physical and intellectual stimulation during the day. Many have said that were it in the evening, they would be more inclined to stay at home, but the daytime activity gets them up and involved in their day.

The sessions are two hours long and we meet weekly. This timing has worked well. At the end of two hours the general response is "over already" but most of us are nearing the end of our energy. We have never tried more than once a week, other than for a performance-based activity, and bi-weekly made too long a gap between meetings.

You and your group however, will set your own schedule once you have determined your purpose.

## ***2. Space***

Ida and Old Baldy play in a community hall with a stage, a community center with no stage, and in a theatre building with a stage which is sometimes available to us. When we can't play on the stage we use the theatre lobby.

The physical component of most theatre/drama exercises requires a large empty space for moving about. Many exercises are played in circles involving the whole group. Chairs are a necessity as many ACTors find it necessary to either sit or have support.

Unless the focus is primarily production, it is unnecessary to have a stage, however a stage creates a unique atmosphere for playing.

## ***3. Drop-In or Linear***

This is a huge decision to make as it impacts nearly everything you plan. Our three programs are drop-in, and although the exercises are progressive in nature, an ACTor can attend once or

twice, then miss a month and still be able to fit right in should they decide to return. This was a group decision made at the outset of the program as we wanted people to be able to join in at any time, and not to feel they could not return should they have other commitments which prevented their attending every session.

The disadvantage of this option is that the uncertainty of who will be attending can impact planning. While every session is unique, there are many occasions that reference is made to a previous activity. As well, there is little opportunity to use the activity as a tool for teaching acting skills which build from session to session.

Also, as a drop-in activity, the facilitator is the only one who is making a commitment to the program.

A *Linear Program* would allow for more constructive planning, and would permit a performance aspect to the program, but could run the risk of cutting out people who could only attend on a casual basis.

Last year, our Cedar Heights group created a Murder Mystery (see Appendix) which was played as a dinner theatre during the late spring, and so ran as drop-in during the first half of the year, and linear during the second half. We are going to attempt to do something similar with all three programs this year by running the first half of the year as a drop-in, and the second half as linear.

#### **4. Dealing with disabilities**

Know ahead of time that your group will be an average cross-section of the senior population and will present a wide range of disabilities. At the first session, describe the activities which will be taking place, and ask ACTors if they will be compromised. Then ask how best the group can assist so the experience is positive for everyone.

I neglected to do this the first time through, and instead asked ACTors for feedback at the end of the session. One ACTor replied "It must have been fun, because everyone was laughing. I actually didn't know most of what was funny." It turned out

that her hearing is very weak and she needed to see the moving lips of speakers. Had I thought to identify this ahead of time, it would have made her time much more pleasant.

Most people in this environment are quite willing to share issues that will prevent their participation, so do not hesitate to ask.



There are normal cognitive functions that become slower as we age and many of these are part of what we are asking ourselves to do in Seniors' Theatre sessions. *It is important to recognize that these are not "disabilities"....they are just part of our "reality."*

With that in mind, as facilitator you need to know that some tasks may take us longer:

- Working our way to solve a "new" problem or type of problem
- Speed of processing generally
- Remembering sets of instructions, or names of new acquaintances. It is going to take us a few repetitions (hear it/see it) to be comfortable

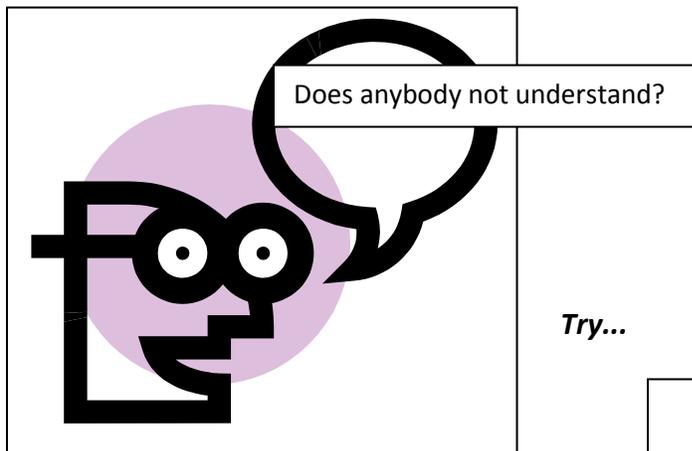
It is important to share this basic information with ACTors and to use strategies that lessen the stress that people may feel. Ida and Old Baldy begin every session with group activities that focus on repetition of names and stories. It creates a comfort zone knowing that everyone's name is going to be spoken right at the start. We also make it a point to insist that names are used in every conversation.

We want to avoid situations in which people miss out on events and activities because their memory is not what it used to be.

*I stopped attending Senior's Theatre after the first two sessions. I was enjoying the activities, but I simply couldn't remember the names of the people I was working with. It was too embarrassing. I just gave up. I used to be a newspaper reporter...I could remember everything!*

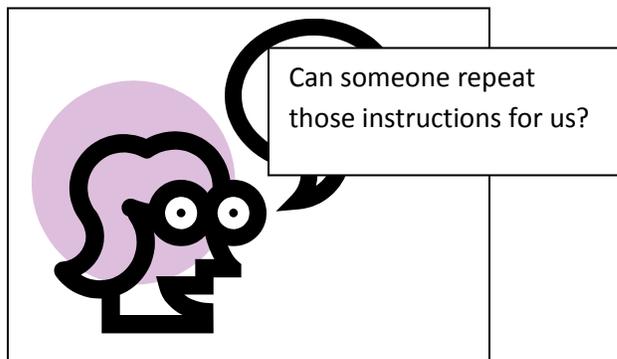
And never put people on the spot! Always phrase things using the most positive stroke.

### **Avoid---**



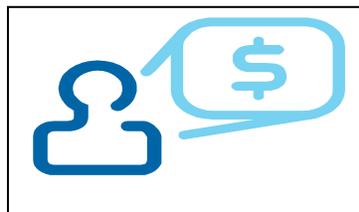
***Nobody wants to admit that they don't know, so don't put them in that situation.***

***Try...***



## 5. Cost

Part of the answer to this will be whether it is a volunteer activity or whether the facilitator(s) are going to be reimbursed. There is also the cost of the venue you will be using. Ida and Old Baldy's is a volunteer activity so there is no cost for that component, but all of our buildings have requested that they be reimbursed for at least part of the cost of heat and light so we have charged a \$2.00 drop in fee for each session and a membership fee to Shuswap Theatre (\$10.00) to cover insurance. The facilitator is going to accrue costs for materials and for perhaps for travel so you will need to determine how to factor that into program costs.



The insurance factor is something you need to consider. If you are playing as part of an existing theatre program or a community center activity, and the participants join the theatre group or the community center, then that is the best way to deal with it.

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# Program Guidelines

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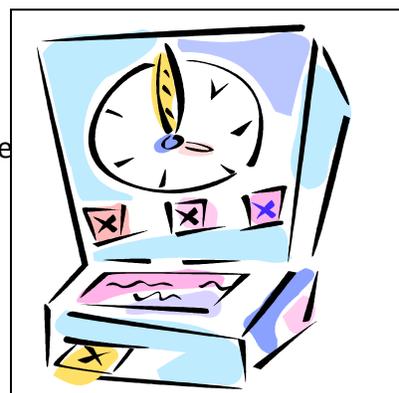
One of the most frustrating things in any volunteer activity, is to have your time taken for granted. Ida and Old Baldy's started out with a set out guidelines that for the past three years have served us well, and so we share them with you. If they work for you, that is great. If not, create your own.

## **1. It's About Time!**

There are few things more annoying to a person who arrives on time for an event, than to have to sit idle waiting for those who chose not to be on time. Even worse, is waiting for the facilitator to arrive and to get organized. As facilitator, you need to have everything ready to go and to be greeting people as they arrive. Set your opening activity to be one that it is easy for late arrivals to join. That way you have set the expectation for starting on time and still welcomed those who just couldn't get there.

If you choose to wait, acknowledge that you have come to the start time but that you are waiting. And....this may sound silly, but be sure to end on time as well. People have a multitude of other commitments and need to have their time valued.

During the session...



- If you say “15 seconds left” be sure to close the activity in 15 seconds
- If you don't know how long it is going to take try “I'm not sure how long we need for this...we'll give it three (?) minutes and then decide”

## **2. Start with a standing/moving activity**

The longer people sit at the start of a session, the more they become rooted to their chair, Ida and Old Baldy sessions typically begin with ACTors moving about the space. It allows them to explore the working environment and the movement is generally coupled with light stretching exercises. These are coupled with quick pair exercises and partners are always “the person closest to you.” It also a free-flowing series of activities which allow for any latecomers (mentioned previously) to quickly insinuate themselves without any sense of interruption.

## **3. Do your homework-Planning is critical**

Whether you want it to be or not, what you are doing becomes known as a “class,” so

you need to approach it with some of the basic instructional tools of a teacher. Good planning ensures that the allotted time for the session is well used. A smooth transition between activities keeps players active and engaged.



Arrive on time and ensure that the materials you will use for the session are ready to go. It is always a good idea to have one or two “extra” activities in reserve, just in case things go more quickly than you planned. Adult learners are great to work with, but they can be voracious and will eat up your great ideas quickly.

Gathering materials will either become a joy or an albatross. Poring through collections of poetry, looking for a piece which is just the right length and seems suitable for your group, may well take you to places that you otherwise would not have been. Looking for a passage in a novel that would work as a monologue has you reading in a totally new way. Scanning a magazine and having a photo jump out at you as a great starting place for an improvisation changes your focus.

#### **4. Let PLAYers know there is a plan**

You built it and you invested time in the plan, so put it out there so that everybody knows that you have thought this through and what we are doing is not random. As you get further into the sessions, participants will start to anticipate what is coming.

Not everybody sees and hears as well as they once did so it is a necessity to deliver the instructions/plans in as many formats as possible.

Post an outline for the session that ACTors see as they come in, and then after the opening activity do a quick overview. That way people have both seen and heard what the session will entail.

Make certain that all ACTors understand what they are being asked to do in each activity. Even if it is an exercise which has been used a number of times, it never hurts to review.

Today's session

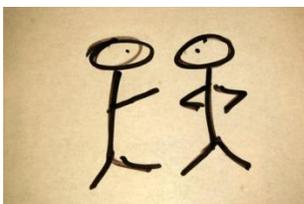
1. Physical warmup—balloon man
2. Getting to Know You  
Topic- suggestions for reforming  
Childhood. Remember to rephrase
3. First Lines-keep them going until it is clear that you have used up your ideas.
4. Statues-groups of four or five- everybody takes a turn being the sculptor
5. Poetry-The Highwayman
6. Script Work- excerpt from Salesman
7. Journal
8. Closing activity—the resident expert

## 5. Learn to avoid Stop Signs



This is one of the most difficult areas to “teach” but it is absolutely critical. It is always easier to block the development of a scene or activity than it is to move it forward.

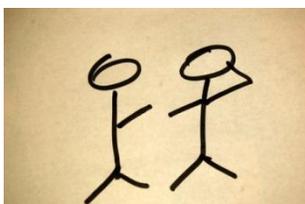
*Would you mind watching my father while I slip into that restaurant for a bite of lunch?*



*No way. I'm busy.*

This is a Red Light because it doesn't move the scene anywhere. It forces everything back to the first PLAYER who must try a new tack to get things going.

*Would you mind watching my father while I slip into that restaurant for a bite of lunch?*



*I'm kind of busy.. As long as he won't mind helping me put up these posters..*

Gives a direction for Player One to respond to and allows the scene to move on.

## 6. How Much Performance?

Once you have created the dynamic, it quickly becomes clear that everyone is a performer. So...you need to decide if you are going to show everything that people do, which takes up a lot of time, or if you are going to showcase one particular exercise.

It is important to get the point across that while theatre can be performance, the value of most of what we do is in the creative process.

Ida and Old Baldy seem to have found a reasonable mix as everyone will have been “on stage” once or twice during a session to demonstrate exercises, and will also have presented at least one performance piece.

## 7. Critical Vocabulary

# Sample Session

The Appendix contains the outlines of the first ten sessions which were delivered as part of Ida and Old Baldy's Seniors' Theatre Project. They are included there as guidelines that you may choose to use to get the process started.

This Sample Session outlines the general construction of the two hour sessions along with a rationale for using each of the activities and projects.

The first half of each session (45 minutes to an hour) typically runs through a series of warm-up activities and games which get the blood moving, the ideas flowing, and the enthusiasm high. This format stays the same; the activities are changed so things stay fresh. See the Appendix for a list of other activities we have used



Sample Session	
1.	Physical Warmup-Walkabout
2.	Cognitive Warmup 1-Three things you remember about the house you grew up in.
3.	Cognitive Warmup 2- First Lines— we have a new set today!
4.	PC Warmup- One-Two-Three
5.	Vocal Warmup-Three pieces from Hamlet
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give thy thoughts no tongue</li> <li>• To be or not to be</li> <li>• What a piece of work is man</li> </ul>

The second half is focused more on skill development and performance and there is no standard format, although there will always be



an element of improvisation.

A

6A. Improv 2-3 characters using props—using a deck of cards, a key, and a “wad of cash” create a max 3 minute improvised scene around the theme of love.

7A. C haracter building from photo. Create a backstory for your character—where is she now and what happens next.?

B

6B. Improv 2 characters  
First line must contain the word jump  
Last line must contain the word forever  
Three minutes max -have at least four separate entrances

7B. Readers' Theatre  
The Highwayman in groups of three break it up and rehearse for presentation

C

6C. Improv- Three characters Son/daughter and live-in parent  
As a full group, identify issues which could occur in this relationship.  
Explore one of those issues in improvised scene

# 1. Physical Warmup

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## ACTivity Walkabout (6-10 minutes)

### Materials required- None

**Rationale**-PLAYers are up and moving, and so are immediately into the activities of the session. Physical exercise *stimulates the brain* and nearly all studies show that moderate physical activity improves cognitive performance. So, that being said....let's get moving!

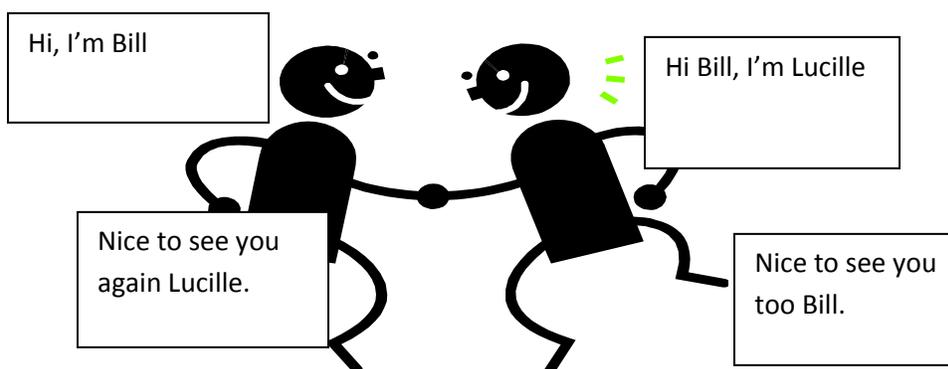
*Full group exercises* work best as no one is excluded. Latecomers can join into the activities immediately. Partners are established randomly so there is no hanging onto "the person I came with"

*Names are repeated* throughout the exercise

**Format**- PLAYers move about the space going to all corners and touching all walls and identifying the location of chairs, obstacles etc. Facilitator will suggest types of actions as ACTors move through the space. Try the following as examples: (a more full list of examples is in Appendix –Physical Warmup Walkabout)

- You are Gulliver in the Land of Lilliputians so it is necessary to watch your step
- You are walking on ice
- You are on a moon walk
- You have concrete blocks strapped to your boots
- It is pitch dark
- You are looking for a lost pet

As the PLAYers move, the facilitator calls "FREEZE." PLAYers then partner with the closest person. PLAYERS introduce themselves to their partner **whether they have met before or not.**



The facilitator then gives a short improvised two person activity. For example

- Building a stone wall
- Stopping a crew from cutting down a heritage tree
- Pulling burrs out of a dog

At the end of one minute, facilitator calls TIME and PLAYers resume the walkabout using another type of movement suggested by facilitator.

The movement-freeze-improv cycle is repeated three times.

## 2. Cognitive Warmup One

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### **ACTivity *Storytelling* (10-15 minutes, depending on size of group)**

#### ***Cognitive Warmup-Storytelling***

**Rationale-** Utilizes both short and long-term memory through storytelling and retelling, establishes social contact, and uses personal names. Speaking clearly and listening skills are necessary. Most importantly, it creates a pattern for seniors to use when receiving and passing on information that is transferable to any situation. We use the scripted format to establish that pattern.

**Format-** Each PLAYer finds a different partner than has been worked with in the Physical Warmup. Facilitator provides a topic, example—“What are three things you remember about the house in which you grew up? “ or “What color makes you feel happy....and why is that?” The question is then asked, responded to, and validated in a scripted manner.

**One-** Jim, can you tell me three things you remember about the house in which you grew up?

**Two-** Mary, you asked me to remember three things about the house in which I grew up.

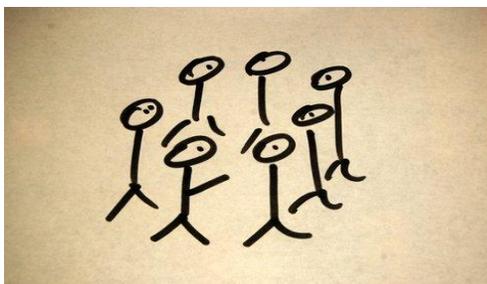
**One-** Yes, Jim, I did.

**Two-** Well, Mary, one of the things I remember was the way my father always whistled.....

**One-** Jim, I heard you say that one of the things you remember about the house in which you grew up was the way your father always whistled when he came home from work, **Two-** You got it Mary. and another....

The PLAYers then reverse the process with **PLAYer Two** asking the question.

The whole group then comes into a circle, and each PLAYer introduces his partner and repeats the new information to the whole group. It provides an opportunity to use names again, and work with short-term memory.



*“Everybody, this is my friend Nina, and the three things that Nina remembers as a child are the way her father whistled when he came home from work. It always made the house feel cheerful. She also remembers the smell of damp socks drying on the radiator that was .....”*

This is a very popular activity as it gives an opportunity to share a story which has probably not been told for a long time, and then validates that story by having it repeated to the whole group. The difficulty is usually getting people back on track.

*The exercise works within the ten to fifteen minute time frame with a group of ten to twelve, if your group is larger, create two circles.*

**Note-It is important to remember that each individual owns his or her memories and they are only sharing them with us. On occasion, someone will share a memory that seems highly unlikely. For example, one participant shared a Christmas story in which she was running from WW2 German soldiers through the streets of London. Nobody in the group questioned the story, we simply asked questions about how that made her feel at the time.**

## 3. Cognitive Warmup Two

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### **ACTivity First Lines (6-8 minutes)**

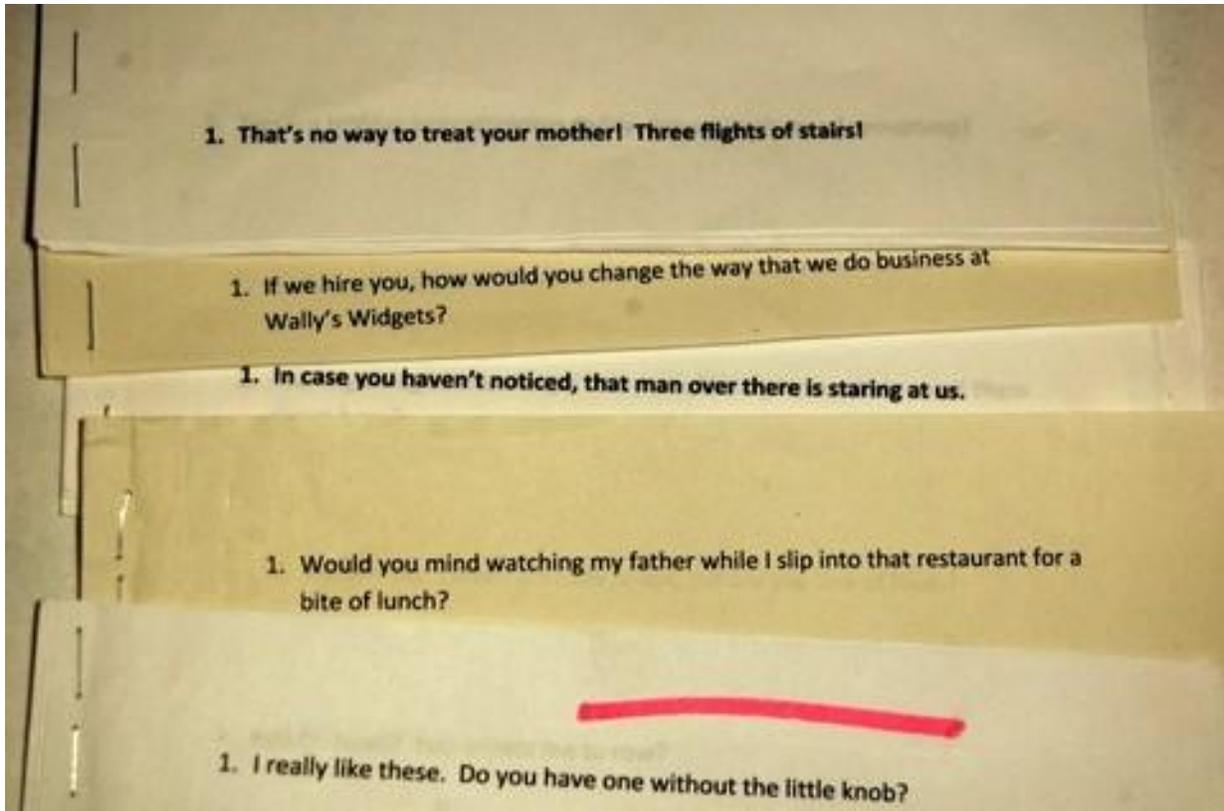
#### **Cognitive Warmup Two**

#### **Materials Required- Sets of lines (See Appendix)**

**Rationale-** This exercise moves from simple recall, to creation and invention.

**Format-** Ida and Old Baldy play this with sets of first lines which have been stapled together. PLAYers work in pairs, and each PLAYer is given a set of five lines. For example the top set in the illustration contains the following five lines:

1. That’s no way to treat your mother! Three flights of stairs!
2. You are looking very attractive today. Have you changed something?
3. Who was that stranger I saw you with last night?
4. Stop fidgeting. You’re embarrassing me!
5. Well, you certainly know how to liven up a party. Where did you learn that trick?



One partner reads first line, and the objective is to create a conversation/scene which will last from 30 seconds to a minute. The second partner then reads their first line and a new conversation is started. This activity goes back and forth until all five lines have been completed.

This is a great exercise for PLAYers to work on responding in ways that keep the discussion going and to learn to avoid lines which put up stop signs. (See section on Program guidelines about Stop Signs)

## 4. Physical/Cognitive Warmup

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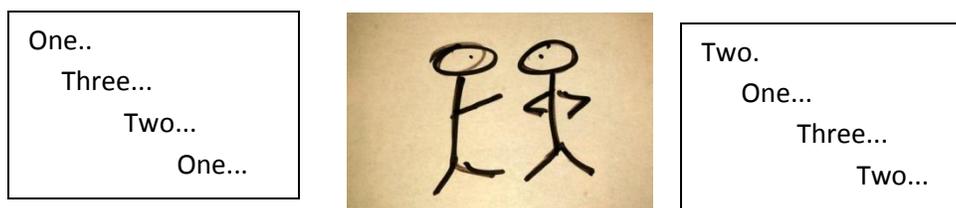
### **ACTivity-One-Two-Three (5 minutes)**

#### ***Physical-Cognitive Warmup***

#### **Materials Required-None**

**Rationale-** Now that the brain is in high gear, and we have warmed up the body parts, it is time to put them both together. These exercises are designed to test our focus and our ability to multi-task. Generally, these are also very challenging exercises and end up in a lot of laughter.

**Format-** PLAYers work in pairs facing each other. Taking turns they count to three.



The objective is to get as quick at this as possible. The facilitator then has PLAYers substitute a handclap for One so the exercise becomes Clap-Two-Three-Clap-Two-Three.

A finger-snap or head-tap or foot-stomp or some other physical activity then takes the place of Two and the mayhem is unavoidable.

**Note- This is a quick warmup exercise. Most of the other physical/cognitive activities are considerably longer in length. You will need to choose your warm-ups based on the other activities you want to work on in the session.**

## 5. Vocal Warmup

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### **ACTivity-Oral Reading (20-25 minutes depending on size of group)**

**Materials Required-** Copies of poems, short speeches, etc. mounted on Bristol or card stock. Ida and Old Baldy have a collection of about fifty poems which have been collected over the past three years. Mounting the work on heavy board makes the poems easier to work with, and easier to store.

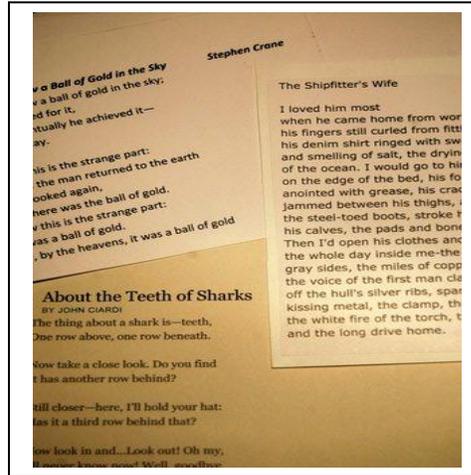
**Rationale-** Reading aloud to children has always been recognized as an important part of literacy development, but we are finding that reading aloud by and to seniors also has huge benefits. According to [Vox Daily The Official Voices.com Blog](#), it

- Sharpens your focus
- Increases your vocabulary
- Results in greater comprehension
- Challenges your use of intonation
- Improves listening and reading skills

It is also a good lead-in to our Readers Theatre which begins with long narrative poetry and a great exercise for drawing-in an audience.

**Format-** Selections are spread out on a flat surface for PLAYers to select. They are first read to themselves to check for vocabulary/expressions/phrasings which are unclear. We then read and walk about the space getting to know the work. After three to five minutes, facilitator checks for readiness and then PLAYers stand and deliver their work. All pieces are read at the same time and PLAYers are instructed not to listen to anything but their own voice. When all PLAYers are ready, work is read

individually to the group. PLAYers are taught to read “over” the work in their hand and to make eye contact to engage every person in the room during their reading.



*It generally works best to select short poems so that readers are not overwhelmed by the volume of the words. It also helps to give everyone a chance to perform equally*

From this point, the sessions move into more Theatre based activities where there is a greater focus on performance.

## Appendices

### A. Physical Warmup Activities

#### Physical Warmup Activities 1 *Walkabout*

Materials required- none

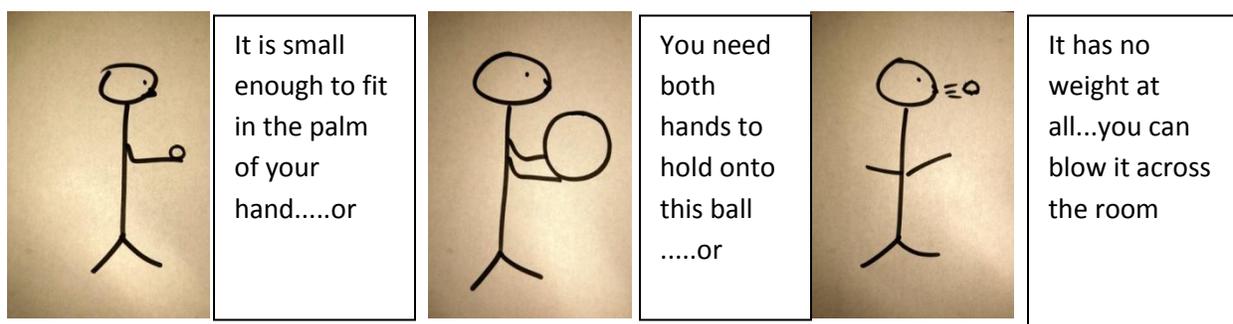
- You are Gulliver in the Land of Lilliputians so it is necessary to watch your step
- You are walking on ice
- You are on a moon walk
- You have concrete blocks strapped to your boots
- It is pitch dark
- You are looking for a lost pet
- You are pushing a giant rock

- Your feet are rooted to the ocean floor and your movement is only in the swaying of your arms and body
- You are a cat burglar
- You are using a periscope to determine where you walk
- You have a secret which no one else is to see
- You are walking knee deep through a fast-moving stream

## Physical Warmup Activities 2 -*Space Balls*

Materials required-none

Space Balls are invisible and thus can be any size you want them to be. Generally they begin by fitting in the ACTors' pocket. Once the actor brings the ball out, it gains its definition. Initially it works best if the facilitator describes the ball....as a drama exercise we want the ACTor to visualize the ball, its weight and substance.



When you see that ACTors have visualized their balls, have them form pairs and pass the balls back and forth. The activity will depend on the nature of the balls...for example

- The balls may be weightless and be blown back and forth across the room
- They may be balloon-like and not have any sense of direction
- They may be beach ball-like
- They may be medicine ball-like and only be passed a short distance

And....

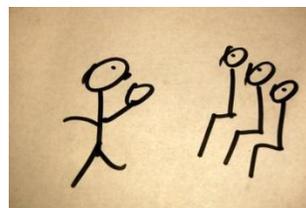
- The balls may get mixed up with the balls of others
- They may collide
- They may do all of the things that a room full of balls will do.

However....when the facilitator calls freeze, every ACTor should know the location of the invisible ball.

The Space Ball exercise has unlimited applications



*We may have to work together to push a giant space ball across the room.*



*We may explain the unique characteristics which make our space ball special*

Always remember to put the space ball away at the end of the exercise.

### **Physical Warmup Activities 3 -Balloons**

Materials required- none



1. PLAYers stand in a slouched, relaxed position with knees slightly bent and imagine inflating themselves by blowing through pursed lips. Blow up to being larger than life and barely able to remain on the ground. Then deflate and slowly return to the original position.
2. Blow up a partner using the same process. The player doing the blowing and the player being “blown up” need to synchronize the blowing and inflating. Try having the balloon deflate in stages to get the synchronicity.
3. PLAYers imagine having a helium balloon on a string. It is a windy day, and the balloon wants to explore. Add balloons until the PLAYer is being controlled by the balloons. Close the exercise by having the balloons released and the PLAYer watching them disappear.

### **Physical Warmup Activities 4- Joining In**

Materials required- cards (preferable) or sheets with activities prewritten

Players are in a circle. Facilitator has a card on which is written an action. The card is handed to one PLAYer who must begin that action. Other PLAYers join into the action as soon as they think they understand what is being done. Examples of these activities are:

- Reshelving books in a library
- Putting studs into snow tires
- Grooming a very large animal—or a whole group of small animals
- Conducting an orchestra and trying to discover the instrument which is out of tune

- Harvesting fruit/vegetables

The activity should not change until all PLAYers are involved. If there is a PLAYer who has not joined, one of the others should give that person something to do in order to join in.

As soon as it is clear the activity has run its course, stop, debrief and then facilitator gives another card to another PLAYer.

### **Physical Warmup Activities 5- *Sculpture***

Materials required- List of projects to be sculpted

PLAYers work in groups of three to five. One PLAYer is nominated as the sculptor, and the others are the medium. The facilitator calls out the image to be sculpted and sculptor moves the other PLAYers into positions to create the image. The sculptor **cannot show or tell** other PLAYers how or where to move, they must be **physically manipulated** into position **without touching**. When the sculpture is complete, sculptors move about the gallery to look at the work of other sculptors. The process continues until all have had an opportunity to sculpt.

### **Physical Warmup Activities 6- *Blind Trust***

Materials required- None

PLAYers work in pairs. One PLAYer is the guide and partner has eyes closed. The guide moves the partner around the room using only visual clues. As the group “matures” this exercise can move to one sighted person moving a train of “eyes closed” participants about the space.

## B. Cognitive Warmup Activities

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### **Cognitive Warmup Activities 1-Storytelling**

Materials required-topics to be shared by facilitator

Over a period of time, the storytelling can move from recalling previous events to envisioning. For example:

- If you were a divine being, how would you remake men/women?
- If you could only have three books from now until the end of time, what would they be?
- What would have been the best thing about living in the time of King Arthur? (or any other time period)

And then to opinion pieces:

- What change would make it more enjoyable to live in our community?
- Is it acceptable to love one grandchild more than another?

The most important part of the activity is giving PLAYers an opportunity to tell a story or speak their truth, and having it repeated by and heard by others.

### **Cognitive Warmup Activities 2-First Lines**

Materials required- Series of opening lines

Rationale- Quick response and working with a partner to make something happen. Listening to partner is critical.

### **Cognitive Warmup Activities 3- The Great Debate (5-10 minutes)**

Materials required-Debate topics, noisemaker loud enough to cut through the discussions.

Rationale-Multi-tasking, keeping more than one “think” going at a time.

PLAYers work in pairs and decide who is affirmative and who is opposed. When facilitator calls out the topic, partners immediately begin to argue. The intention is to speak down the opposition and not to listen to the other argument or to respond to the other argument because that would indicate the PLAYER had been listening. At the sound of the noisemaker, PLAYers immediately change positions and argue the opposite of what they had been saying.

*“This is hard to do. We have always been taught to listen to other people, and now we are supposed to shout them down. It sounds like Christmas dinner at our house!”*

It is not as easy an exercise as it sounds. Typically, at the sound of the noisemaker, there is a moment of silence as PLAYers scramble to get their heads around the other point of view.

This is a quick change exercise so let it go for only a minute or so, then change partners and do it again. A good exercise for getting people to work with lots of partners in a short time.

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## C. Physical-Cognitive Warmup Activities

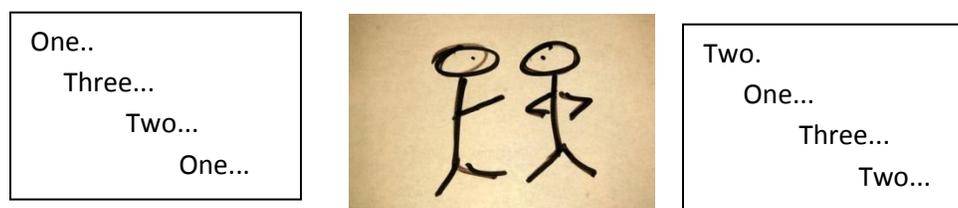
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### Physical-Cognitive Warmup Activity 1 *One Two Three*

Materials Required- None

**Rationale-** **Rationale-** Now that the brain is in high gear, and we have warmed up the body parts, it is time to put them both together. These exercises are designed to test our focus and our ability to multi-task. Generally, these are also very challenging exercises and end up in a lot of laughter.

**Format-** PLAYers work in pairs facing each other. Taking turns they count to three.



The objective is to get as quick at this as possible. The facilitator then has PLAYers substitute a handclap for One so the exercise becomes Clap-Two-Three-Clap-Two-Three.

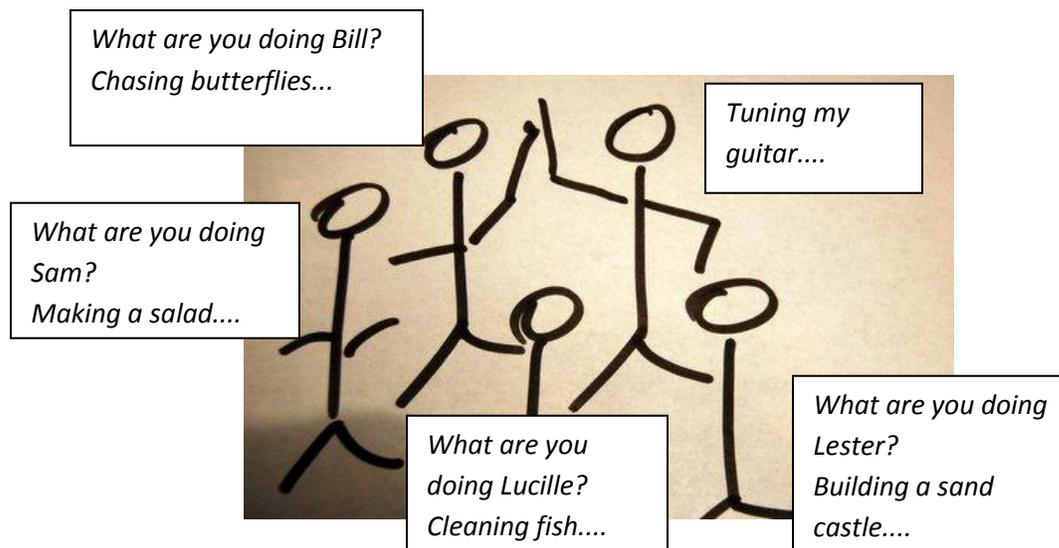
A finger-snap or head-tap or foot-stomp or some other physical activity then takes the place of Two and the mayhem is unavoidable.

### Physical-Cognitive Warmup Activity 2 *What Are You Doing Ida?*

Materials Required- None

**Rationale-** Much like chewing gum and rubbing your tummy, these exercises are designed to test our focus and our ability to multi-task.

**Format-** PLAYers stand in a circle. The facilitator begins an action such as tuning a guitar. The PLAYER to the right of the facilitator asks "What are you doing Name." The facilitator must continue **doing** the initial action, but must **say** he is doing something else. "I am chasing butterflies Name." That PLAYER must then begin chasing butterflies. The PLAYER to his right asks "What are you doing, Name," and again the response must be something different than chasing butterflies.



The activity continues going around the circle. The biggest challenge that PLAYers encounter is trying to say they are doing one thing while continuing to focus on doing another. Even when we start by having all our PLAYers have a number of actions in mind before the action begins, most of us forget what we were going to say.

### Physical-Cognitive Warmup Activity 3 *What's My Line?*

**Materials required-** 8 x 11 sheets with occupations clearly printed. These can be prepared by the facilitator ahead of time. Ida and Old Baldy use this exercise as a team game as well, and in those cases the teams prepare the list of occupations so you would require markers and paper.

**Rationale-** A great team-building exercise which requires quick mental processing, movement, and a willingness to appear silly in front of your mates. Similar to charades, except that one person is guessing and everyone else is moving and acting.

**Format-** We have just been given a new job but we don't know what it is. The other PLAYers are going to act out our new job for us. A single chair is set facing the group and PLAYER One takes the seat. Facilitator (or if it is teams, a member of the opposing team) holds up the occupation behind the seated PLAYER and the rest spring into action to create the work environment. No one is allowed to talk other than the PLAYER who is guessing. As soon as the correct response is given, the second PLAYER takes the seat and we go through until everyone has had a turn.

Early stages, the occupations are relatively simple. However, as the skill level increases so does the complexity.



You are a

- Tree hugger
- Fishmonger
- Bodyguard for Queen Elizabeth
- Door-to-door trombone salesperson
- Fast- food drive-through person
- Violin maker

## D. Research Base

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### Cognitive Skills & Normal Aging-Emory University Alzheimer's Disease Research Centre

A commonly held misconception is that aging results in an inevitable loss of cognitive abilities and that nothing can be done to halt this decline. Research, however, does not support these claims. While certain areas of thinking do show a normal decline as we age, others remain stable. Moreover, interventions may actually slow some of the changes that do occur.

- **Intelligence:** "Crystallized" intelligence, i.e., knowledge or experience accumulated over time, actually remains stable with age. On the other hand, "fluid" intelligence or abilities not based on experience or education tend to decline. Examples of "fluid" intelligence include ability to think and react quickly, mental flexibility or mental "multitasking", and learning of new information.
- **Memory:** Remote memory or recall of past events that have been stored over many years remains relatively preserved in old age. Recent memory or the formation of new memories, however, is more vulnerable to aging. Most often, this means that older individuals take longer (i.e., have to hear/see it more times) to learn new information than they may have when they were younger.
- **Attention:** Simple or focused attention such as the ability to attend to a television program tends to be preserved in older age. Difficulties may be encountered, however, when divided attention is required such as trying to pay attention to the television and simultaneously talk on the telephone.
- **Language:** Verbal abilities including vocabulary are preserved as we age. Common changes have to do with word retrieval or the process of getting words out. It takes longer and is more difficult to find the words one wants when engaged in conversation or trying to recall names of people and objects. The information is not lost but it is more difficult to retrieve.
- **Reasoning and Problem Solving:** Traditional ways of approaching solutions are maintained in older persons. Wisdom of experience in older age can lead to better approaches to some of life's problems than some younger individuals. However, problems that have not been encountered during the older individual's life may take extra time to figure out, and it may be difficult to think of alternative ways of solving a problem.
- **Speed of Processing:** Aging does affect the speed with which cognitive and motor processes are performed. This does not mean that the activities cannot be performed, but rather that they take longer!

#### What Other Factors Affect Cognitive Aging?

All of the above abilities can be affected by factors that change the efficiency with which older adults process information. These include:

- Medications which may produce side effects such as drowsiness and mental dullness;
- Sensory changes which can interfere with the processing of information (e.g., loss of hearing which can affect whether or not someone's name is heard when introduced);

- Health related changes such as arthritis and pain which can affect cognitive areas such as concentration and processing speed; and
- Changes in mood such as depression and anxiety which can alter one's motivation to learn new information and to apply active learning/memory strategies. Such feelings can also limit one's ability to solve problems and make it more difficult to concentrate.

### **Can Anything Be Done to Compensate For or Slow Down Age Related Changes?**

A previous view was that as we age, brain cells inevitably die off and are not replaced. This concept led to the belief that nothing could be done to alter the inevitable. We now know that certain interventions can sharpen cognitive processes. These include:

- **Reducing Stress:** Researchers have found that high stress levels impair learning and memory in both animals and humans. Strategies to reduce stress such as relaxation and exercise may be beneficial. In fact, a growing body of research suggests that exercise may be one of the most best ways to improve the health of your brain.
- **Maintaining Good Health:** Regular visits to the doctor are critical to make sure that medical conditions which can themselves impair thinking are under good control. In addition, possible interactions among medications should be evaluated by letting your physician know all of the medications you are taking, even if not prescribed by that particular doctor. A diet rich in fruits and vegetables containing antioxidants such as blueberries, strawberries, and broccoli as well as certain fats such as olive oil may be neuroprotective.
- **Keeping Mentally Stimulated:** Studies have found that engaging in challenging cognitive tasks can protect against age-related declines in thinking and the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. It is important to keep oneself stimulated through activities such as playing bridge, reading, and attending adult education courses. There is no proven magic in doing a particular type of cognitive task (like crossword puzzles), just pick something you enjoy doing that challenges your brain, and do it!
- **Using Active Strategies:** There is evidence that some of the difficulties in storing new memories are due to the fact that older persons do not spontaneously use strategies to encode this information. When they do, age differences are weakened. In addition, older adults demonstrate good recognition of new information when they are helped with cues to jog their memory. Strategies that can be helpful to facilitate memory include following a routine (e.g., always putting one's keys in the same place), using external techniques (e.g., a calendar, a pill box), and taking more time to actively process new information (e.g., when introduced to someone, pay extra attention and try to come up with an association to recall that person's name)