

THE V/F VALIDATION® TRAINING INSTITUTE, INC.

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A Non-profit Agency Devoted to Wise Aging

CLINICAL COLUMN

Q. SOME FAMILY MEMBERS SAY THAT THE VALIDATION® GROUP IS CHILDISH. THEY DO NOT WANT THEIR PARENTS SINGING NURSERY RHYMES OR USING RHYTHM INSTRUMENTS. WHY DO YOU USE SO MUCH MUSIC IN THE VALIDATION® GROUP?

A. Old-old disoriented people who benefit from Validation® groups are diagnosed as having a dementia of the Alzheimer's type (SDAT). The word "dementia" was first used in the nineteenth century by the French physician Pinel (1745-1826) to describe mental deterioration caused by damage to brain cells. The term "senile dementia" was introduced by Esquirol (1772-1840). The word "dementia" is derived from the Latin, "dis," away from, and "mens," the mind. Validation® theory acknowledges the mental deterioration of these very old people, but affirms that they are not mind-less. They have lost cognitive capacities: logical thinking; the ability to name objects; to remember dates, names; to classify people; and to define things (i.e., a chair belongs in the category of furniture; a mother is someone who has children). Dictionary words and recent memory have gone. They return to early, familiar thoughts. They forget their present age. Their brains no longer inform them of present time and place.

This is why the Validation® group worker uses primary, one-syllable words.

The worker does not emphasize present time and place or the need to remember names or to verbalize. Attempts to teach disoriented old-old to name objects and to retain recent facts lead to anxiety and frustration. Disoriented group members withdraw, become agitated, and demand to leave the group. With damage to recent memory, a short attention span, and loss of secondary-school learning, disoriented old-old restore early, well-established, primary memories and familiar social roles. They cannot classify people in present time, so they turn present-day people into loved ones from the past. Losing distinctions, they freely associate ideas, images, word-sounds, people and objects. They cannot follow a wordy, intellectual abstract concept; they cannot express their memories in words. They have lost the words. Like a poet, they allow one thing to remind them of another. They think in metaphors. Unlike the poet, they have lost the "as if," the logical connections. They no longer remember how things are different. They cannot compare similar things. A hand that feels as if it were a baby **becomes** a baby. A poet says, "the baby-like hand." The disoriented old-old person can no longer use the comparison "like."

The Validation® group worker uses few words and does not expect disoriented old-old to follow one thought through to a logical conclusion. Early learned melodies, nursery rhymes, and prayers associated with strong emotions remain permanently

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imprinted in the brain's circuits. Despite damage to neurons, these Time Confused people retain music-memory and familiar movements and rhythms from the past. They also have stored a crystallized wisdom molded from experience. They can express this wisdom through music, social roles, movements and simple words clothed in emotions. In the Validation® group, they communicate with well-remembered songs. They help each other overcome loneliness through touch, moving together in dance, the use of rhythm instruments and familiar work-related roles. A former bank clerk hands out receipts. A former teacher helps a non-verbal group member sing a familiar song. A mother passes the juice and cookies. Universal human needs for love, for usefulness and for expressing emotions are met in the Validation® group. When the Validation® worker accepts the loss of logical thinking and respects their intuitive knowing, disoriented old people tap dormant potential. Even when they sing well-remembered nursery rhymes, their dignity is enhanced.

