

# **Workshop: Validation for oriented co-residents of people with dementia in long-term care for the elderly**

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## **The initial impulse**

I work as a validation teacher in a senior citizen centre of the Diakonissen Speyer. Not so long ago I had the following experience: At the end of a seminar for employees a resident approached me. She seemed resolute and had a pressing concern. "Mrs. Neu", she said, "I live here in a community with people with dementia. I know you train employees in Validation. But you also have to train us roommates, because we have to live together with people with dementia day after day! We are still there even when the relatives and most of the employees have gone home and only the night shift is left." I took up this impulse and developed and implemented a workshop "Validation for co-residents" as a project within the framework of the course "Palliative Geriatrics".

### **1. Why do oriented residents want to participate in a validation workshop?**

The idea for the workshop was discussed and clarified in an information event for oriented co-residents at the above-mentioned senior citizens' centre. The participants recounted how strenuous living with people with dementia can be for them. They feel burdened by roommates who constantly shout "hello", run back and forth looking for their mothers, get lost in strange rooms and ask what time it is every five minutes. Participating in a validation workshop would be a good way to learn to understand the behaviour of people with dementia and how to more easily cope with them. One resident summed up the essentials: "I am now 100 years old. I can die at any time. But as long as I live, I can still learn from others and pass on experiences. I can still make a contribution to living together with people with dementia."

### **2. How the workshop project was implemented**

The seven oriented residents, aged 70 to 100, who had decided to participate, met on four mornings from 10:00 to 12:00 a.m. We talked about a number of topics: Losses in old age, old age and dementia, disorientated behaviour as an expression of needs and feelings, centering, finding the right distance, simple validation techniques as an opportunity to come into contact in a sensitive and appreciative way. The contents were deepened with short presentations and videos on Validation. Exercises were done on the techniques of centering, observing, closeness and distance, repeating key words, W-questions (who, what, where, when, how, how often) and singing.

### **3. Results**

In the last session, the participants developed the following statement, which was presented to the facility management:

What do oriented residents need in order to be able to live harmoniously with residents with dementia in a residential community?

1. **Fundamentals:** In order to understand people with dementia, oriented residents need information about dementia. They need help and guidance to understand the needs and motivations behind the disorientated behaviour.
2. **Basic attitude:** empathy, appreciation and attentiveness for the other person (with and without dementia), composure, patience and the willingness to take time.
3. **Self-awareness:** This includes recognizing and consciously perceiving one's own limits; ("I don't have to do everything to myself and don't have to deal with every behaviour!"). Establishing relationships when one feels strong enough, making use of opportunities for retreating and "validating" oneself by recognizing and respecting one's own needs.
4. **Transparency:** knowing who the validation professionals are in the institution who you can approach when you feel that a person with dementia needs support.
5. **Positive perceptions and experiences:** When you notice that validating someone leads to contact with other residents with dementia; a smile is returned or someone calms down when you hold their hand; you also feel good about yourself. You get something back.
6. **Opportunities for exchange:** Living together with other people in a community is not always easy. Especially when behavioural changes seem incomprehensible at first. It is then important to be able to talk about it with others.
7. **Participation in organizational processes:** Old, oriented people have a lot of life experience. They are the experts for their life phase. In addition, they feel that they are part of their community. Therefore, they should be included in the structuring of everyday life in the home - also with regard to living together with people with dementia. Their observations and insights contribute to the well-being of all.

In addition to the residents' representatives, there is now also a group in the facility that meets regularly for further discussions on the topic of living together with dementia.

### **Summary and outlook**

The policy paper "Palliative Geriatrics" talks about making a good life possible for old people with and without dementia. The workshop participants all belonged to the target group of palliative geriatrics. For them, it was an element of good living to be deserving of a validation

seminar and to have their experiences heard and understood. People with dementia who live in integrated residential communities benefit from the fact that oriented flatmates can better cope with them. In the interest of dignity for all of us, it is worthwhile to include people affected and implement the principle here as well.

Further workshops are already planned.

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