

The 5 Big Hints

The 5 Big Hints task is especially designed for groups who have members with cognitive decline—especially those with Alzheimer's disease.

It is typical to present 10 to 20 items in a 30 – 60 minute activity session. **The goal is to provide memory cueing in ways that are informed by scientific research on memory loss** (as discussed in the book *Roses Grow in a Butterfly Garden*, available at www.clovepress.com). The 5 Big Hints activity bears some resemblance to a centuries-old game that we played as children, in which one child thinks of an object and the other child asks questions in order to try to figure out what it is. However, "5 Big Hints" is designed very specifically to *aid remembering in AD*. Thus, the cues are tailored to *help participants guess the target item*.

Present the items and their clues one-at-a-time.

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Category:

Hint #2:

Hint #3:

Hint #4:

Hint #5:

Giving Hints: Speak and Print

Provide each hint in the game verbally and in print. Start the session by printing the terms, "5 Big Hints"; "Category"; and "Hint # ___" in erasable, large black or navy print on a whiteboard (or, alternatively, in white chalk on a chalkboard). Then, use another color (e.g., dark green on a whiteboard, or yellow on a chalkboard) to fill in the actual hints for an item during a round (e.g., "ANIMAL"; "It lives in the water."). The different colors of ink help to define the two columns (left v. right). The terms on the left side of the board (like "Category") stay in place from round to round, but the words on the right side (i.e., the specific hints) are erased after each round.

Use all CAPITAL letters for printing the category label. Other labels and hints are printed in upper- and lower-cases, with no cursive writing. Try to keep the sentences simple, so that complicated grammar doesn't confuse lower-functioning participants.

Also, about the whiteboard, do not use red ink. It makes the letters harder to see.

More About Giving the Hints

Notice that "Hint #1" (above) does not carry that label; it is best to begin with a category clue (e.g., animal, location, transportation/vehicle, etc.). Thus, "Category" is the first hint. Usually, the fifth hint is an aesthetically *pleasing picture* of the target item, *or* you might show a

picture of the item *immediately after Hint #5*. **Show the picture, regardless of whether the participants have guessed its name correctly during the previous hints**, because the picture serves as a visual cue to aid memory and to reward participants.

Generally, an activity session with "5 Big Hints" has 10 – 15 participants, whose seats are arranged in auditorium-style. However, this task can work one-on-one or with small groups (up to 5). The cards to accompany these instructions carry clues on one side and an item's picture on the reverse side. If using the two-sided cards, keep the picture facing down while reading the hints. That way, participants won't accidentally see the picture before the last hint is given!

A mixed group (with both high- and lower-functioning participants) will not work well if some of the higher-functioning members are prone to impatience. It is fruitful to know who might enjoy taking part and to select personalities that will "gel well" rather than "grind like metal on metal!" Playing competitively (in teams) can work, *if it suits participants' personalities*.

When utilizing the "5 Big Hints" activity for normal and high-functioning elders, include more "rare" items and make the hints more difficult. For example, although a mixed group might be asked to guess "rose" from 5 hints, a group of normal/high-functioning participants might be asked to guess "thistle." Admittedly, they are both examples of vegetation, but roses are among the most commonly known and loved flowers, while thistles are less common and less frequently discussed. To make the activity suitable for a mixture of cognitive levels, include some easier items and some more difficult ones. Showing a picture at the end of each round helps to provide cognitive stimulation and pleasure for all participants—regardless of whether they guessed correctly during that round or not. It's important that pictures have artistic qualities, and that they do not merely look like photos taken from a grade-school picture book. The artistic quality of the pictures adds to enjoyment of the activity.

With respect to the order of stimuli (pictures), do not use two items from the same category in consecutive order. Especially for persons with Alzheimer-type dementia, the problem of perseveration is common. It can lead a person to think of and name the same item several times in succession. Given this phenomenon in AD, it can create undesirable interference in memory when one item from a category is presented right after another item from the same category. It might lead a person to continue to say the name of the just-previously-presented exemplar. This is the reason that the hints (in Dr. Seifert's book, *Roses Grow in a Butterfly Garden*) *are not arranged by category*. Do rearrange their sequencing from session-to-session and week-to-week, in an effort to provide variety, but maintain the rule that consecutive items are not from the same category.

Each of the cards may have a number associated with it. These numbers in no way reflect the order in which to use the cards. The numbers are for documentation purposes (Clove Press, LTD., 2009). Also, the instructions herein are not intended as specific consultation. Individual professionals are responsible for assessing their appropriateness for application.