

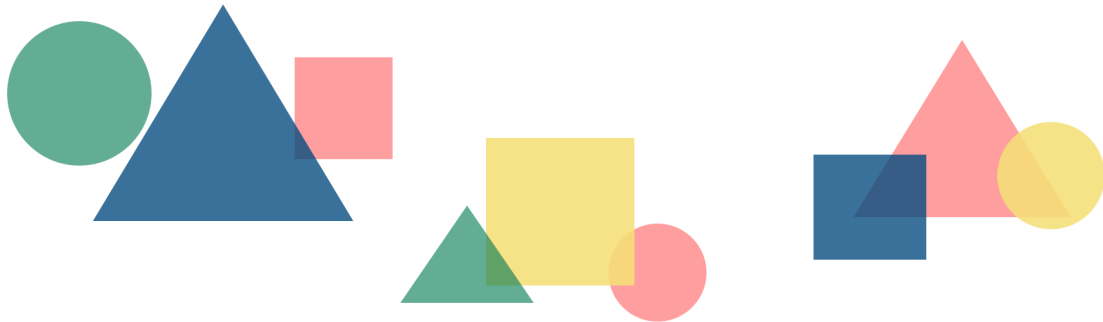


**Yee Hong Centre  
For Geriatric Care**

頤康中心

# Play Intervention for Dementia

CAREGIVERS' & VOLUNTEERS'  
**Practice Workbook**  
Built on the foundation of SSLD



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**...the game and play is merely a tool  
creating engagement and synchronization  
is where the magic happens**



## **SSLD Play Intervention for Dementia (PID)**

*Providing stimulation that the brain needs through carefully designed activities and tasks in a positive emotional environment.*

### **ACTIVITY ● PLEASURE ● INTERACTION ● CREATIVITY**

The main purpose of the PID Program is to encourage seniors to have fun, express themselves better, interact with each other, and enhance their cognitive and self-care capacity.

The program builds on the SSLD System created by Professor A. Ka Tat Tsang at the University of Toronto, and integrates research knowledge in neuroscience.

The key idea is to provide helpful stimulation to the brain through carefully designed play activities. People living with dementia will learn new responses and tasks within a positive emotional environment.

Dementia is a medical term referring to a variety of conditions affecting the brain. Medical professionals talk about dementia as a disease, and they pay attention to the symptoms, which may include loss of memory, compromised judgment and reasoning, and changes in behavior and emotion. These changes can affect a person's everyday activities, performance at work, interpersonal relationships, and social functioning.

Success of medical treatment for dementia is limited at the moment. For most patients, there is no medication that can provide a complete cure. Some medications can be helpful in managing symptoms, and some patients can be helped by non-medical interventions. We believe that most people living with dementia continue to need a healthy amount of activity and stimulation. The PID is designed to arrest neurological deterioration, improve emotional experience and overall functioning, and enhance self-expression, communication and interaction.

We wish to support people living with dementia and their caregivers to take a proactive approach, and shift away from pessimism, helplessness, and inaction. We wish to build hope on the basis of directly observable changes, and encourage everyone to take action to make a difference.

The PID was first created in 2013 and has been piloted in Canada and Asia, with very encouraging results. Systematic research to document its efficacy is planned for the next phase of its development.



## SSLD Play Intervention for Dementia (PID)

ACTIVITY ● PLEASURE ● INTERACTION ● CREATIVITY

### Dementia

- Dementia is a condition wherein the ability of the brain to process memory and cognition progressively diminish affecting the individual's daily activities, personal relationships, and social functioning.
- This condition has significant implications to clients' quality of life.
- Common in older adulthood, dementia is considered to be one of the most difficult conditions to manage because it affects both the client and the individuals who care for them.

### Dementia Treatment and Intervention

- Although there is very limited success in the medical treatment of dementia, there have been advancements and innovations that allow us to mitigate the difficulties that people living with dementia and their caregivers experience as they go through the process of managing and coping.
- Pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions are available to help provide clients and their caregivers with better quality of life.
- Non-pharmacological approach based on the application of our understanding of neuroscience and neuroplasticity have allowed us to provide interventions that emphasize stimulation and learning for older adults and their caregivers.
- One of such interventions is the Play Intervention for Dementia (PID) program based on Strategies and Skills Learning and Development (SSLD) system developed by Professor A. Ka Tat Tsang of the University of Toronto.

### SSLD Play Intervention for Dementia

- Learning and positive change is possible for clients with dementia
- Offers comprehensive assessment of clients' needs, circumstances, characteristics, and capacity (N3C)
- PID program shows encouraging results in pilot programs conducted in Canada and Asia. More systematic research to establish its effectiveness is now being planned.



**The main purpose is to provide older adults with the following:**

- **Activity** - The program engages client in game and activities that stimulate the brain and promote cognitive and sensory-motor functions. Activities are provided individually and in groups. The program provides a safe, challenging, and stimulating experience for people living with dementia. The activities foster respect, dignity, and positive regard to the client's personhood.
- **Pleasure** - The program provides a space for client to experience enjoyment, fun, and pleasure through stimulating activities. It helps to alleviate depression and other negative emotions that tend to exacerbate the symptoms of dementia. It is important for clients to feel joy and excitement while engaging in the activities. This will allow them to become more engaged and self-aware, thus enhancing their sense of self.
- **Interaction** – The program increases client social functioning by creating an environment conducive for socializing and peer interaction. Social interaction is important for people living with dementia. The program provides clients a space for human contact and continuous building of relationships.
- **Creativity** – The program allows participants to use imagination, skills, and creativity. By allowing them to explore the games on their own, they are able to express themselves resourcefully and artistically. This facilitates personal growth, learning, and development that can be a source of accomplishment and empowerment.

The PID program integrates practice and research knowledge of neuroscience and psycho-social interventions. The brain's neuroplasticity allows the neurons in the brain to rewire itself; new nerve cells can actually continue to develop even with older age. It is now understood that the brain is not a static organ but rather a dynamic organ that is able to change and adapt to changes. Essentially, in neuroscience, the concept of '*use it or lose it*' directs us to the notion that the brain is able to alter its functional networks through stimulating activities and thoughtful mental exercises despite the presence of neurodegenerative disorders associated with dementia.

The PID program is designed to slow down the progression of dementia through its incorporation of carefully designed activities that promote varied stimulation, learning, re-learning, and practice. The program provides a positive and emotionally supportive environment where people living with dementia can learn new skills and responses to daily challenges brought about by dementia. The PID program encourages clients with dementia to have fun, express themselves, and interact with others, all of which contribute to improvement in their cognitive, social and emotional functioning.



## Program Components

1. Comprehensive assessment of the needs, circumstances, characteristics and capacity (N3C) of the person living with dementia, not just the severity of her/his condition
2. Carefully designed activities addressing the individual N3C of the participants in an experiential group format
3. A parallel educational program for caregivers to support the transfer of learning and continual development
4. Additional individualized booster sessions (home visit option available)
5. Additional individualized consultation and coaching sessions for caregivers

The PID program, built upon the SSLD system, uses multiple contingencies thinking (Figure 1.1). This means that the PID program focuses on various aspects of the client's life and social environment instead of only focusing on the pathology of the client's dementia. It is the goal of the PID program to provide support for clients and their caregivers by inculcating proactive approach in managing and coping with dementia. The PID program focuses on problem translation (Figure 1.2) wherein practitioners translate the problems and unmet needs of clients in to actionable goals that lead to positive changes in clients' personal realities and social environment. Through this, it is the hope that PID program to give clients and their caregivers the optimism and hope through thoughtful activities that make life challenges meaningful.

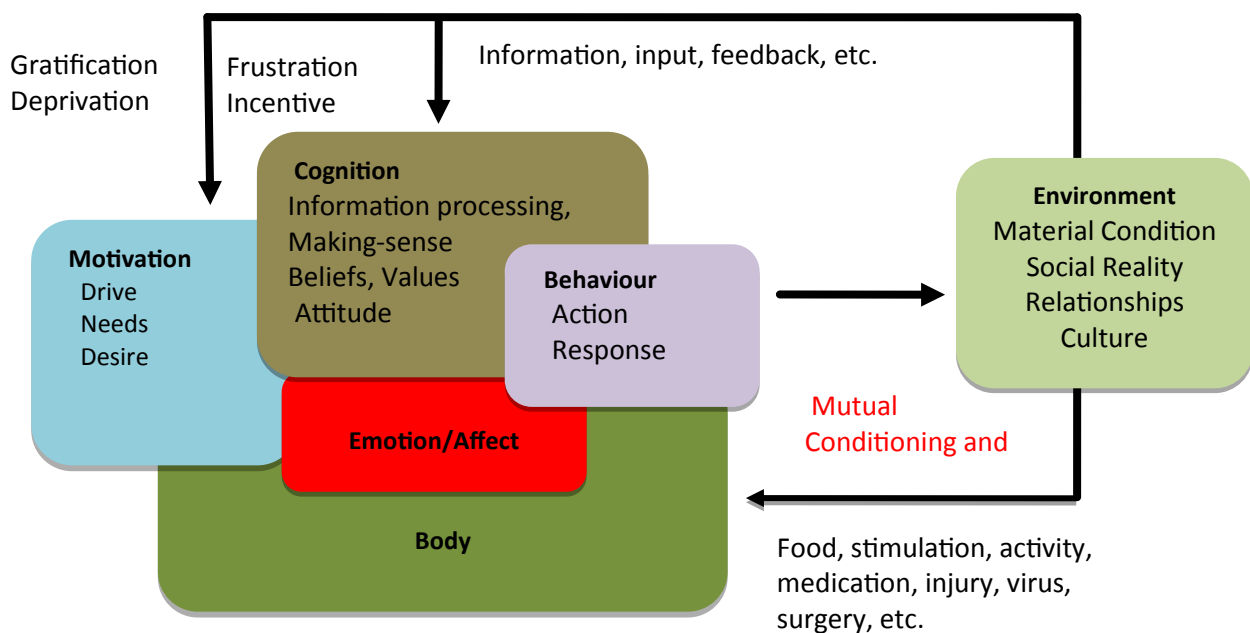


Figure 1.1 - Multiple Domains of Learning and Change

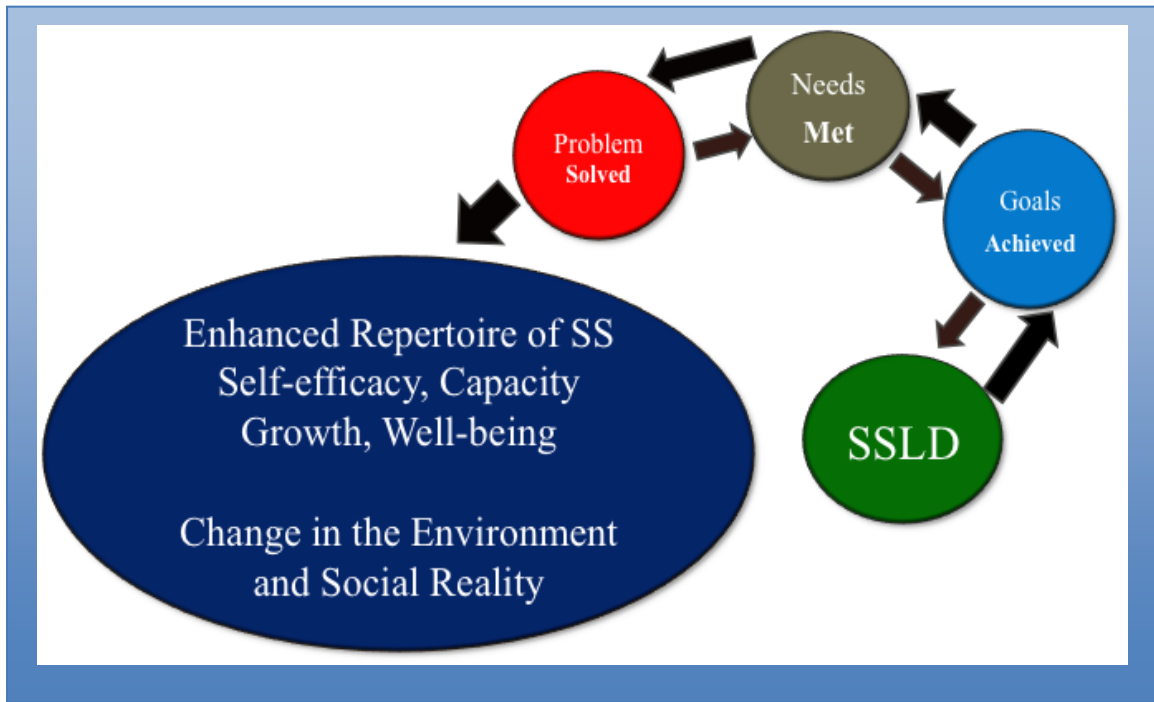


Figure 1.2 - Problem Translation and Change Process in SSLD

**all behaviours are motivated by un-met needs  
...the person is telling you something**



# The simple 4 page instructions





# Play Intervention for Dementia (PID)

An SSLD Application

## Brief Description of Procedure

The program starts as the Program Facilitator gives a brief introduction (approx. 1-2 minutes) regarding SSLD Play Intervention and introduces any outsiders that the group of seniors have not seen before. The seniors should have a safe and comfortable environment.

Past experiences have shown that 75 minutes is an ideal length for the program, but there should be flexibility. A 75 minutes program can easily fit into any day program schedule, however if time is limited, 30-45 minutes should be fine as well. There is no limit to how many people can participate at the same time, as long as we have sufficient space and staff.

Seniors are divided into groups (each with 4 to 6 members) and to be supervised by staff. We normally refer to these smaller groups as “corners” and the staff person as “Corner Facilitator.” Different sets of games will be rotated across groups, each set of game/toy should last approximately 8-10 minutes; hence seniors participating in a 75 minutes SSLD Play Intervention would get to play 6-8 games. Staff is encouraged not to repeat the games unless the games have run out.

It is recommended that all groups in the program should end with a musical percussion game. Staffs should provide seniors with various percussion instruments. Using those instruments, seniors will follow the beat generated by the Program Facilitator. The sounds and positive energy generated excites the senior, and create a sense of community and collective ritual. In our experience, some participants may be interested in and capable of leading this activity. This can be supported as long as it does not prevent other participants from coming forward. Inviting other participants to co-lead can be one of the ways to prevent the role from being monopolized.

When the program is going well, we would see seniors moving faster, becoming more delighted and active, or performing creative or unconventional tasks/actions with the toys. It is okay for them to bring up unconventional content, such as sex-related topics (e.g., they may be playing with dolls and say that they are hugging, kissing, or making love). Do not block them as it would limit their imagination and expression. On the next page are some of the guidelines on how to prepare for SSLD Play Intervention.

PAGE 1



- The Program Assistants (volunteers/staff/caregivers/family) will transfer toys and games between tables. Clients remain seated at the same table or corner. Corner Facilitators can stay in their corners or migrate, depending on the mood and the flow of the specific session. [It is important NOT to leave any group of seniors unattended]
- Have extra sets of toys ready, so clients do not wait when a game finishes early
- Lighting: Bright and natural lighting in a room with large windows is preferred
- Time: 8-10 minutes per game, no more than 15 minutes. 60 to 75 minutes total
- Some light music with a delightful mood is sometimes found to be helpful, but it is not always necessary, we encourage program staff to pay attention to the seniors' response to music. The group can also be making music together.

### Staffing for PID

The PID program is relatively labor intensive. Apart from the active play intervention, the participants often need attention and physical assistance (e.g., picking up dropped toy items, going to the washroom, getting water to drink, etc.). The following table

Staff Member	Role	Staffing Ratio
PID Program Facilitator (Director)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall responsibility for conducting the program</li> <li>• Provide instruction and support to team members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 per program</li> <li>• A Program Co-Facilitator can be hired for bigger groups</li> </ul>
Corner Facilitators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate play process at assigned corner/table</li> <li>• Observe and document the response of participants</li> <li>• Never leave the participants unattended</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 per corner/table of 6</li> <li>• Corner Co-Facilitator can be added when necessary (too many co-facilitators may reduce interaction)</li> </ul>
Floor Assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the corner facilitators – Pay constant attention and respond immediately to signal for help</li> <li>• Transfer toys/games across corners according to schedule and/or instruction</li> <li>• Watch playing participants to enhance safety</li> <li>• Pick up dropped items</li> <li>• Assist with washroom calls</li> <li>• Provide water/drinks upon request</li> <li>• Assist in sanitizing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum 1 per program</li> <li>• 1 more for every two corners/tables added</li> </ul>



## Preparation for the program

### 1) Setting up the area

SSLD Play Intervention should be set up in an area that is well lit, preferably with large windows that provide bright, natural lighting. Set up small round tables or square tables that could seat 4-6 people per tables; the number of tables required depends on how many seniors are participating. Toys should be prepared in easy to carry plastic trays or containers for easy transfer. Background music is not required; but if decided to play background music, delightful, non-familiar music is recommended to avoid distraction.

### 2) Staff

SSLD Play Intervention is labor-intensive; it requires a high staffing ratio. Staff does not have to be highly trained since instructions are easy to follow, some of them can be regular volunteers or family members. Firstly, one staff member is needed per table to administer each game and watch over the seniors (Corner Facilitator). Such staff person should be a stable anchor person, although having Corner Facilitators migrating across tables can sometimes flow every well and add to the energy. It is important to ensure that the clients will never be left unattended. Secondly, a few more people (Program Assistants, staff, volunteers, family) are needed to be standing by in case of emergency, or when transferring toys or for bathroom breaks etc. Finally, there should a Program Facilitator or Director who conducts and oversees the entire program.

Staff should be polite and delightful. It is advised that staff should provide minimal instructions to seniors when they are playing, they should allow them to play with the games creatively unless the deviation makes it impossible for others to play, or creates hazards or risks. It is okay for seniors to create new rules and break existing rules; the important thing is for them to have fun. There is no need to discourage intimate intragroup interaction, except when there is obvious risk of harm or disruption.

### 3) Toys/Games

All toys need to be made from non-toxic material, avoid objects with sharp or pointy edges to prevent injury. While balls are often on the toy list, choose balls that are bright in color, easy to grab and not too bouncy. There should be some extra sets of toys to avoid seniors waiting for the next game. A key point is rapid succession of games without waiting.



4) Number of participants and grouping

In theory, there is no limit to the number of seniors participating in the SSLD Play Intervention; ultimately it depends on the space and number of staff available. Ideally each group should be 4-6 people so it is easier for staff to manage and enable group interaction. Grouping could be based on cognitive capacity, for example using MMSE. However, we do not have to be too rigid about this, since many people with low (measured) cognitive ability can perform and participate very well in many of the games. There is no rule regarding how to divide the seniors in terms of gender, but past experience has showed that mix-gender groups can work very well.

5) Other:

Ensure consent is obtained for clients (themselves or their substitute decision maker) to participate. Additional consent has to be obtained for any kind of electronic recording.

**remember to  
kill the game before it dies!**

RESTRICTED - DO NOT SHARE



# Game Sequence Log

SSLD-PID Program

SAMPLE  
WORKSHEET

Program/Organization:

Corner Facilitator:

Date:

Game	Purpose Function	Duration (minutes)	Participants' Response / Observation

RESTRICTED - DO NOT SHARE



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Game	Purpose Function	Duration (minutes)	Participants' Response / Observation

RESTRICTED - DO NOT SHARE



## N3C Assessment

**Needs:** Conditions required for human life or the kind of life you want

**Circumstances:** External environment, things that happen

**Characteristics:** Who you are and what you are like

**Capacity:** What you are good at

	Needs	Circumstances	Characteristics	Capacity
Physical	food, oxygen, sensory stimulation, water, shelter, warmth	climate, housing condition, residential status, non-chronic medical condition	height, weight, skin color, sex, chronic medical condition, disability	eye-hand coordination, stamina, endurance
Psychological	security, self-esteem, attachment, mastery, control, achievement, actualization	stressful work, traumatic event, break-up	personality, intelligence, emotional response pattern, cognitive style	emotional regulation, impulse control, executive function
Social	acceptance, approval, identity, membership	employment status, immigrant status, social institution or environment	demographic (race, class, gender, etc.), social group membership	social network, financial resources, social capital





### **Circumstance and Characteristics**

- Circumstances typically refer to external realities. Such realities are usually not permanent, but changeable.
- Characteristic typically refer to internal or personal qualities. Such qualities are usually stable or permanent.

### **Characteristics and Capacity**

- Capacity usually just refers to characteristics that are positive, useful or valuable. In theory, all capacities can be subsumed under characteristics. For example, if Heather is a good baseball player, that is certainly part of her personal characteristics. We can also say that good badminton skills are also part of her physical capacity.
- We are creating a separate heading for capacity mainly to balance the tendency in human service and health care to focus on people's problems, or their pathology and symptoms. In SSLD practice, we focus on people's capacity and strength, for we are ultimately interested in what they are capable of doing.

**there is no perfect assessment...**

**the key is to observe what's most relevant  
and meaningful to the specific individual**



## How to Play: Some Top Tips

- Create positive expectancy - “Kill the game before it dies, and you can play again later!”
- Keep the game short, preferably less than 8 minutes
- Create feelings of satisfaction and mastery with play (Make the person feel useful)
- Praise and encourage creativity and new ideas
- Express your care and show attention to the person
- Don’t criticize
- Movement beats inactivity
- Break difficult play into smallest possible steps, start small!
- Curb your desire to give too much help, encourage person’s problem solving
- Use descriptive comments instead of asking too many questions
- Reward quiet play with your attention
- Don’t compete with the person in play
- Pace the play at the person’s level and interest
- Engage in role play and make-believe with the person; encourage their emotional expressions
- Be an attentive and appreciative audience or participant (You can show your attention by describing the person’s behaviours and emotions)
- Turn daily living tasks into play, with found objects (e.g. folding clothes, making dough)
- Create a comfortable environment for play (e.g. lighting, temperature, toys)
- Beware of your communication styles, particularly non-verbal techniques (e.g. tone of voice, touch, sitting arrangement)
- Keep a log of your games, and what works for the person at a given time
- You can invent with multiple ways to play with one toy
- Allow pauses between play, to give time for the person to process what is happening
- If open-ended invitation does not work, you can offer few choices for the person
- Look at what the person are still capable of doing, and go with it!
- If you keep on playing the same play, the “fun factor” effect will go down
- Ask for other’s help if you run out of play ideas. Create a community!
- Create a ritual to begin and end a play, (e.g. sing together)
- There are no fixed rules
- Wait, watch, and wonder!



## LET'S PLAY!

Remember: Play does not mean being childish. The essence of play is in the engagement and synchronization that's created!

### Play Principles:

- Find out the person's N3Cs: Needs, Circumstances, Characteristics, and Capacities  
(All behaviours are telling you about the person's needs)
- Identify the purpose for play, and meet the person's unique needs with play
- Follow the person's lead in play, and also encourage change
- Observe, record, and adjust your play to meet the persons unique, changing needs
- Promote the stimulation of the person as a whole (e.g. body, mind, emotions, spirits, human connections)
- Promote interpersonal interactions (the human contact!)
- Be flexible with play (i.e. when, with whom, what, where, and how to play)
- Play in an incremental manner
- Create a supportive network to play together, and to learn how to play going forward (e.g. with peers)
- Laugh and have fun together, enjoy the process!







Notes:

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of multiple horizontal lines.



**Play** • • •  
**Intervention**  
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