

## How to Use MindPlay Connections™ Effectively – Condensed Version

The most important thing to remember about MindPlay Connections (MPC) is that **its primary purpose is to serve as a prop for helping people to connect with one another**. While it is also intended to create new connections in people's brains, it's mainly a tool for enhancing socialization. Therefore, approach is key: not testing one's brain power, but encouraging a playful mind. Invite others to "*Play along with me.*"

Almost all titles in the MindPlay Connections collection have four types of exercises:

- Discussion topics
- Imaginative or reminiscence exercises
- Trivia quizzes
- Word games

Most exercises are two-pages long so that they can **easily be printed** as a one-sheet, two-sided handout, because participants often like to be able to see as well as hear the information being presented.

One way to incorporate MPC titles into your regular programming is to **hold weekly club meetings** for each of the above categories. You can ask participants to come up with their own club names, or you can start by calling them something upbeat like the Let's Talk Club, Share Your Thoughts Club, Tantalizing Trivia Club and Wily Word Lovers Club.

Most MPC material is also adaptable to people with dementia, as noted below.

### Discussion topics and imaginative or reminiscence exercises

These activities are designed to **promote interaction by asking for participants' ideas, insights, opinions, advice, and experiences. There are no wrong answers**, which means that people with dementia can have as strong a role as anyone's.

**Discussion topics** are generally about 1-1/2 pages with discussion questions at the end, but you needn't wait until the end to ask those that are appropriate earlier. For maximum participation, ask for volunteers to read each paragraph. (If the print is large enough for them to see, people with dementia can read far into the disease process, although they may not read with comprehension.) Questions like, "*What do you think of that?*" or "*Do you agree?*" can be asked at the end of any paragraph.

**Imaginative exercises** are especially good for our brains because, by definition, they ask us to make new connections. *“Imagine your best friend as a bowl of soup. What kind of soup would she be and why?”*

**Reminiscence topics** are also often written to encourage new brain connections: *“Think about an outfit you loved to wear when you were young. How does it compare with children’s clothes today?”* Many people with dementia can reminisce about the distant past, and might enjoy discussing a lighthearted topic like their Roy Rogers pajamas.

But this is one section that may also incorporate opinions about values. *“Do you think people are less honest today than they used to be? Can you give an example?”* Knowing what people value about themselves and in others provides great insights for building rapport with them.

### Trivia quizzes and word games

If there is one key point to get across about these exercises that have “correct” answers, it’s that **the answers don’t matter**. All trivia quizzes and word games have the answers printed at the end. Yes, that means that anyone can “cheat” by looking ahead, and some people will. But those people – particularly those with dementia – may have had uncomfortable experiences with tests, and they don’t want their fragile self-esteem further battered by not knowing the right answer. Plus, when they look up the answer, they either have their knowledge reaffirmed or learn something new – both good outcomes.

When doing a **trivia quiz** as a group exercise, whether or not people have dementia, it makes sense to look up and discuss the answer after each question. And turning a trivia quiz on, let’s say, The History of Beer, into a discussion on the elements of an ideal tavern or a recitation of bar jokes is perfectly fine. Remember that socialization – **having fun together – is the goal**, not finishing an exercise or coming up with right answers.

When you do look up the answers, celebrate the right ones, and downplay the wrong ones: *“Well, isn’t that interesting? We learned something new.”* And because trivia quizzes are written as true/false or multiple choice, your odds of right answers are good.

**Word games** as presented in MPC are almost always intended to be lighthearted or to encourage wonder at our amazing language. You will find lots of puns, idioms, and music titles that encourage breaking into song. (Please do so.) While people with dementia may or may not “get” the jokes involved, they will react to the upbeat atmosphere. They may need matching games simplified to pairs, but can often handle fill-in-the-blanks and clock game exercises.