

- Select dolls with soft bodies
- Be aware of personal/parental history and any traumatic events a person may have experienced before introducing them to doll therapy
- The person's response should be monitored throughout and effectiveness reviewed
- The doll should never be removed without permission of the person with dementia as this can cause distress



Doll therapy is not for everyone. More women than men will choose a doll to nurture, but some men do benefit greatly from holding a doll.

Explaining fully to family the benefits of this can also help families who find it difficult to accept their family member using a doll.

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## The Use of Doll Therapy in Dementia Care



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## Doll Therapy

As a person's dementia progresses they may start to behave differently. They may develop behaviours that are challenging and distressing to themselves and the people around them. These out of character behaviours can be difficult to understand and are often caused by confusion and distress. Life-like dolls can be given to help relieve this distress and give the person something to love and care for.

Doll therapy is the use of a doll to help ease anxiety and bring joy to people with dementia. Doll therapy can be a good way to engage a person with dementia while giving them a purposeful and rewarding activity. For some people, doll therapy can give them a sense of meaning and purpose.

## Benefits of Doll Therapy

Doll Therapy has been proven to:

- Decrease stress and agitation
- Create a calming effect
- Improve communication
- Reduce negative behaviours such as wandering or pacing
- Increase engagement in activity
- Improve willingness to engage in personal care activities
- Improve dietary intake
- Improve quality of sleep

## General Principles for Doll Therapy

- Do not call the doll 'a doll', for example use terms like 'little one'
- Provide a bassinet or small crib for the doll
- Hold the doll the way you would a baby and ensure it is properly clothed
- Do not purchase dolls that cry, make noises or have eyes that can close, as that could be upsetting
- Do not force a doll on anyone, allow them to approach and hold the doll at their own time or discretely bring the doll to their attention
- Communicate the purpose of the doll for anyone else who may be providing care
- It is up to the person with dementia to decide whether it is a baby or a doll and staff and family should reinforce whatever the person decides. Provide blankets, hats, clothes, gloves, socks