Adaptive Clothing Tips

Besides being attractive and fun, adaptive clothing gets the job done. Here is some helpful information about adaptive clothing:

- Pants and dresses with cutaway seats aid those with limited mobility. Wrap-around skirts and shawls are safer for wheel-chair bound women.

- Loose tops, sweaters, and bottoms that button in front are good choices for your clients with arthritis.

- Front closing bras are useful for women who have limited use of their upper arms.

- Track suits with elasticized waists make dressing easier for clients with joint and muscle problems—and for those who have short term memory lapses.

- Several outfits that look the same work for clients who insist on wearing the same clothes every day.

- Disposable underwear provides dignity for your clients who are incontinent.

- You may want to avoid accessories like belts and scarves. They can be confusing for some clients, and difficult for others to put on.

- If possible, use clothing that fastens with Velcro or zippers rather than buttons, snaps or laces.

- Keep in mind that well-fitting non-slip shoes make walking easier.

- Most people find slip-on shoes to be simpler to put on and take off.

Dressing Aids

Dressing aids make life easier for clients who have stiff joints from arthritis or who have mobility problems. Here are a few examples:

- **Button hooks** can be hand-held. They have a wire attached to a wooden handle and are used to pull buttons through button holes.

- **Sock aids** have long handles with clips on each side, and a device to control the clips where the handle is. They are made to hold each sock in place as you slip into it.

- **Electric tooth brushes** make brushing teeth easier for many disabled people.

- **Dressing sticks** have long handles with short hooks at the end of them and help clients who can’t use their arms to reach to get clothing hangers from closets. They also aid people who can’t bend over to pick up things from the floor.

- **Dressing sticks with shoe horns** have hand controls and are good when clients can’t get their shoes on. Shoe horns without dressing sticks are helpful for us all when we buy new shoes that are hard to put on.

- **Long handle hair brushes** assist clients who have pain and stiffness in their hands or arms.
Respecting Your Clients’ Rights

- Wear your name tag every day and remember to identify yourself when you enter a patient’s room.

- Before you begin care, explain that you have come to assist them with dressing and grooming. Ask permission to touch them and tell them what you will do and how you will do it. (Explaining what you are going to do in advance decreases the chance that your clients will react negatively.)

- Remember to provide privacy by closing room doors and pulling bed curtains. It’s important to make sure that your clients’ bodies are not overly exposed.

- Don’t touch your clients’ personal belongings unless it’s necessary. If you do handle their belongings, be careful and put the items back where you found them.

- Do your best to go along with your clients’ personal preferences every day...such as letting them decide which clothes they’d like to wear or how they’d like their hair fixed.

- Remember that everyone has the right to participate in his or her own care. So, encourage your clients to get involved in their personal care. Even if they aren’t strong enough to get dressed by themselves, they can probably wash their faces or comb their hair. The more they do for themselves, the more independent they will remain!

- Check to see if clients are okay as you assist them. When you complete your care, encourage clients to let you know what you can do to make them more comfortable.

- Never threaten your clients to get them to cooperate. For example, it’s wrong to say, “If you don’t get dressed right now, you can’t watch TV this afternoon”.

- If your clients are wearing anything unusual, keep in mind that they may be doing so for religious or cultural reasons. You may see a thread woven into their hair, a medicine bundle on a string around their neck or a ribbon wrapped around their wrist. Don’t remove any item from your client without their permission!

- Remember that all clients have the right to refuse treatment. For example, if a client becomes aggressive when you arrive to give a bath, let your supervisor know that the client has refused your care.

- Your clients have the right to be treated with respect—even if they’ve been “difficult” in the past. When you work with people who have given you trouble previously, try to start fresh every day. Forget about what happened yesterday, last week or last month.
Dealing With Personal Care Challenges

Many of your clients may have a physical or mental condition that makes the process of dressing and grooming uncomfortable. Here are some tips you may find useful:

For Clients With Dementia

- Remember that most confused clients have short attention spans and no sense of time or place, so help them feel more secure by giving a daily reminder of who you are and why you are there.

- For confused clients, grooming and getting dressed involves a lot of steps and the use of many different skills. It can be a very confusing time. If they get confused or frightened, they may become irritable, uncooperative or upset. Try to keep the environment calm and peaceful. Turn off any TV or loud music before beginning personal care and provide your confused clients with frequent gentle reminders of what you expect from them as you assist with their personal care.

- Try reassuring your confused clients by smiling, holding their hands, keeping your movements gentle and maintaining a relaxed and upbeat body language.

- Lay out clothes in the order that your client will put them on. Then, give short, simple instructions to help your client complete one step at a time.

- Be patient. If you rush a confused client, it will only create anxiety.

- Your clients may be more cooperative if you give them something to do. Let them help by putting toothpaste on a toothbrush, holding a sock while you put on a shoe or folding some washcloths as you brush their hair.

- Consider using a “mirroring technique” when assisting confused clients. For example, hold a toothbrush and pretend to brush your teeth to help a client understand how to perform the task himself.

- Most women with Alzheimer’s Disease stop using make-up during the early stages of the illness. However, if a woman has always worn make-up in the past, she may feel more comfortable if you help her apply some.

- If a client with dementia removes his or her clothing in public, try to figure out why. It may be that the clothes are too warm or are made of fabric that is irritating the skin.

For Clients With Shaky Limbs

- When clients have shaky limbs, sit and talk to them for a few minutes before starting care since certain types of tremors improve when clients are feeling relaxed.

- Encourage them to support one arm with the other when performing tasks such as shaving or brushing teeth.

- Be close by in case they need you, and give them extra time for dressing and grooming tasks.

For Clients With Limited or No Vision

- To help vision-impaired clients feel in charge, tell them about the styles and/or colors of clothing items and guide their hands to where grooming supplies are kept.

- Speak up when you are coming and going to keep them aware of their surroundings and to let them know whether they are alone or with others.
For Clients With Arthritis

- Keep in mind that many people with arthritis suffer from “morning stiffness”. Their joints may be especially swollen and painful during morning grooming and dressing tasks.

- Encourage your arthritic clients to dress their legs and feet first as this requires the most energy. Have them sit down for as much of the dressing and grooming process as possible—to save energy and to keep them from having to bend over so far.

- Avoid clothing that fastens in the back. (For example, a front fastening bra is much easier to put on.) And, cardigan sweaters are easier than garments that pull over the head.

- Remember that some days are better than others for people with arthritis. Don’t be surprised if your clients can function pretty well one day and need lots of help the next.

- Check the fit of your client’s shoes. Remember that people’s feet can change size as they age. If shoes are too small, they will put pressure on sensitive joints. If shoes are too large, they put your client at risk for falling.

- Remember that some of your clients may have specially made splints to help keep their joints in the correct position and reduce pain. Your clients may need help putting on and taking off these splints.

- Encourage your clients to use any self-help devices they may have to help them bathe, dress or eat. If they don’t know how to use a particular assistive device, let your supervisor know.

For Clients Who Are In Pain

- Help your clients avoid getting overtired from dressing and grooming tasks—since being tired can make pain seem worse.

- If a client asks you for a pain pill prior to going through the motions of getting dressed, let a nurse or family member know that the client is in pain and needs attention.

- Remember that some of your clients may keep quiet about their pain due to fear, their beliefs or their cultural heritage. Be sure to look for non-verbal signs of pain such as:
  - Clenching or grinding the teeth.
  - Rubbing or holding a body part.
  - Crying.
  - Losing interest in their appearance.
  - Changes in blood pressure (usually higher).
  - Sweating.

- Watch carefully to see what your clients are able to do for themselves and tell your supervisor if pain is keeping a client from performing everyday activities. Your observations may lead to important changes in the client’s plan of care.

- Try to keep your clients laughing! It has been proven that laughter releases certain chemicals in the body that act as a natural pain medication. (Have you ever noticed how good you feel after you’ve let loose with a real “belly” laugh?)

- As you assist your clients with personal care, remember that it is your duty to notify your supervisor when you know—or suspect—that a client is in pain. Every client has the right to feel relief from pain!