The Benefits of Coloring-in for the Elderly

Coloring-in has long been considered a therapeutic activity suitable for the young and old. Colouring evokes feelings of peace, enjoyment and satisfaction. Revisiting this much loved childhood pastime is well worth the effort.

**Coloring for Adults**

Adult coloring as a hobby has gained so much momentum over the past few years that it has become a craze, with adult coloring books now available for sale everywhere. Activity professionals no longer need to worry that providing coloring activities for the elderly will be viewed as a childish activity.

**The Benefits of Coloring for Seniors**

Research into the effects of coloring activities for people living with dementia show positive outcomes, most notably a decrease in agitation and anxiety.

The therapeutic value of coloring comes in part from a participant’s need to concentrate and in doing so they may ‘forget’ their troubles whilst in the midst of a coloring activity. Relaxation and meditative moods often follow.

Coloring activities are known to:

- Improves mood
- Relieves stress
- Reduces agitation
- Promotes socialization and reminiscing
- Provides an outlet for self-expression
- Helps to maintain motor function
- Improves dexterity (grip control)
- Improves hand-eye coordination
- Encourages cooperation
- Promotes mindfulness (full attention & concentration required)
- Provides a sense of accomplishment

**Materials to Use - quality matters**

- Remember that **quality matters** when introducing adults to coloring; the better the tools the
more spectacular the results. However you can start with a large box of bright colored pencils. If your budget allows, watercolor pencils allow colors to be easily blended and a more life-like result can be achieved.

- Buy quality drawing paper from an art store.
- Find age-appropriate coloring books or printables. Golden Carers provides coloring-in templates for adults across a wide range of themes including line art reproductions of well-known paintings. [Visit the colouring-in library](https://www.goldencarers.com).
- Alternatively you may purchase our [Golden Carers Colouring Book](https://www.goldencarers.com) which includes 30 unique templates designed for seniors.

### Promoting Creativity

Everybody has what it takes to be creative. Some people are shy and find it difficult to allow themselves to be creative because their expectations are too high. They presume that art has to fit a mould rather than surrendering to their mind and mood. Encourage participants to suspend judgment and enjoy experimenting with colors.

You will find that once participants engage in coloring, a contemplative mood sets in over the group and silence ensues. The concentration required for the repetitive motion (up-down and back-forth) promotes a calm and reflective atmosphere.

### Consider inviting children along

Remember that coloring is an excellent ‘Inter-generational Activity’. Coloring with children can be inspiring. Residents who may not color a picture on their own may be willing to color with their grandchildren or visiting school children. Sharing of this activity will promote conversations and the
exchange of thoughts will provide relaxation and enjoyment.

**Planning a Coloring Session**

If you plan to introduce some clients to coloring, there are a few things to remember:

- The tools are important. Adults may find crayons demeaning and decline to participate. Markers (felt tip pens) are not suitable for seniors; they bleed and go through the paper to stain whatever is underneath and they are also hard to control for people with deficits in dexterity.
- Do not give participants recycled paper or office A4 paper (it is thought to be demeaning). Print or photocopy the colouring pages on drawing paper from an art store. They will have paper of different thickness and textures available making the end product more exciting. Or you may transfer the print of choice onto an art canvas with carbon copy paper.
- Encourage and praise participants. Coloring is a form of self-expression; there is no ‘right’ way to color. Each color chosen has a meaning (even if participants cannot put it in words) that subtly affects the body, mind and emotions of participants.

**Run a regular Coloring session**

Start a regular coloring-in session and make it a weekly or fortnightly event. Coloring-in sessions should be stimulating, exciting and worthwhile. Send individual invitations and if possible invite a local
artist to come and talk to participants and encourage them along.

**Coloring for Seniors living with Alzheimer’s Disease**

Colouring sessions are especially suited for people living with dementia or Alzheimer’s Disease. Finding activities for them can be very challenging; the illness progresses at a different pace for each individual and it can be difficult to ascertain what memories they have retained from their past.

If running a coloring session for people living with Alzheimer’s Disease, avoid surrealistic and bizarre dream-like templates, they may only confuse and irritate them. Choose instead pictures they can recognize from daily life or from their past such as vintage cars, cats, laundry, stoves, trains, a cricket landscape, soccer athletes, flowers, birds, and other images. Also take clues from their past; trips aboard, sports played, and landscapes in which they grew up.

**Bring a little color into the world of your clients!**

Coloring activities are filled with fun and you may find that many ‘grown-ups’ are children at heart. Everybody likes to create and coloring is the perfect creative introduction to art.

Related: [Mandala Printables for the Elderly](https://www.goldencarers.com)

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**Have you found coloring-in to be a worthwhile activity with your clients?**