



The ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS PAGE



By Sandra Stimson ADC, CALA, CDP
Executive Director, [Alternative Solutions in Long Term Care](#)

Music: "Peg of My Heart" furnished by [Heart and Soul Music](#) "Providing Quality Music for Nursing Homes"

Sensory Rooms and FTAG 248

ABOUT SANDRA

On a daily basis we receive e-mails from activity professionals around the country asking if they have to have Sensory Rooms? Is it Federal or State regulation? The answer we give is that it is not mandated by the federal government or state regulations that you have sensory rooms. But what is required is that you provide "Quality of Life" for all residents. Remember, that FTAG 248 is not the only federal guideline for nursing homes that apply to recreation. There are many others.

Sandra Stimson has experience as a corporate consultant, Corporate Trainer and National Speaker. Her experience is in long term care, as Activity Director, Director of Alzheimer's Units and Assistant Administrator of a 550 bed long term care county home. She is Co-founder of Pet Express Pet Therapy Club, is a Life Replay Specialist. Sandra implements dementia units nationwide. Sandra has written several books, Volunteer Management Essentials for Long Term Care and Pet Express Pet Therapy Program. Sandra has been a facilitator for Alzheimer's support groups and is the Awards Chair for the NJ Association of Activity Professionals. Sandra is the Executive Director of **National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners**
<http://www.nccdp.org>.

Sensory rooms are really for any population. But generally in long term care it is used for the very low functioning resident's. Sensory rooms provide a group activity in an environment that is success oriented, failure free, purposeful and meaningful. If you don't have programs to fit the needs of this very special population than the question would be, "how are you impacting their quality of life on a daily basis?"

As a consultant to many facilities across the country we do not see enough low functioning programs offered on a daily basis. Either it's not offered enough or not at all. We also see many residents in day rooms unable to participate in the scheduled event, left in their rooms, placed at nurses stations or left in the hallway. If you have a sensory room that is well staffed, it offers a place for the resident's to go that is stress free and stimulating. The sensory rooms can also be used for your NPO programs. As activity professionals you are required to have NPO programs for those individuals who are left in their rooms when meals are being served. During meal times the NPO residents can come to the sensory rooms. Think how hard it must be to smell the food when you cannot have it! In the sensory rooms the stress and anxiety over meal times is alleviated.

[Alternative Solutions in Long Term Care](#) offers resources for health care professionals in many areas of dementia care, care plans, Snoezelen products, dementia activity calendars, adult day care calendars, sensory calendars, reminiscence videos for dementia, activity books, and dates to remember, party supplies, resources and links.

For the residents who are bed bound due to illness, a great program is a Sensory Cart. The sensory cart could be brought to the residents room on a daily basis. You could place fiber optics such as butterfly's above their bed. Sensory carts generally have but not limited to CD players, aroma therapy and fiber optics. Make sure you place the carts where the resident can see them. Otherwise what would be the benefit to the patient?

Anyone who is attending the sensory rooms should have care plans. The Activity Professional should be documenting how often they attend and what they do while in the sensory rooms. You should have simple attainable goals and approaches for each resident. You should have some kind of formal document that nursing would receive that states; which residents are attending the sensory room, time and days of the week.

For infection control, the activity professional should be washing each resident's hand as they are brought into the sensory room. At the end of the day, all of the sensory equipment should be disinfected.

We have implemented sensory rooms in many facilities in New Jersey. What a difference it made! One facility that had over 200 residents identified 43 residents who could not participate in scheduled activities and many of these residents were also on the quality indicator report. Before the sensory rooms opened on each floor, these residents could be found sitting idle with no stimulation. Now all 43 residents attend the sensory room in the morning or afternoon and of course as tolerated. There is a huge difference in a facility with a sensory room compared to those without one.

The sensory rooms also improves customer satisfaction among family members who feel their family member has no activity options due to their function level. With a sensory room you can offer a wonderful activity on a daily basis. When families visit they can also spend time with their loved one in the sensory room. When families visit with their children, the room provides a place for children to also engage in the sensory products. A sensory room is a fun and interactive place for a child.

Sensory rooms should be equipped with rocking chairs. High functioning residents should be encouraged to use the room and the rocking chairs. The rocking chairs are soothing and all of us who have ever sat in a rocking chair can agree how calming an activity the rocking chairs are.

The sensory rooms should also have things to do on each table. Tactile items, pat mats, activity mats, squeeze balls, etc. Also place flash lights on each table. Some residents enjoy turning on the flash light and pointing the light at the wall.

Watch the type of music and sensory stimulation you provide. Smells should not be overpowering. We recommend anything that is recommended for stress relief like lavender. Strong smells such as lemon should not be used. The type of music can also impact the mood. Use music that is soothing such as angel music. It is recommended that you not use music with nature sounds, as dementia clients may misunderstand the sounds of chirping birds or crickets. They misunderstand the sounds of crashing waves as water running and want you to turn it off. For the best outcomes, use soothing angel type music and stress relief scents.

Sensory rooms should have policy and procedures and these should be placed in the administrators facility manual as well as the Activity Departments manual. These should be reviewed on a yearly basis.

If you have been asking your administrator for sensory equipment and feel your not getting anywhere, you might consider finding a facility in your area with a sensory room and bringing not only your administrator but your Director of Nursing. Every facility has resident's who become agitated due the



stress of the unit, lights, noise, crowded conditions and temperature. Appeal to the Director of Nursing how much calmer the floor would be not only for a specific resident but for other residents who are upset by verbal outbursts if you had a sensory room. Also, if you have a sensory room, nursing would not have to watch a confused resident which would free up more of their time for nursing duties. That example is sure to make a difference with a DON.

And if that does not work, try the "survey approach." Surveyors like to see sensory rooms because it means you have great programs for the low functioning residents and having a sensory room might possibly mean the difference between passing survey and not passing survey. Because again, you are required to have programs to fit all residents needs living in your facility. Sensory rooms can definitely help you with appropriate programming and survey outcomes.

So in answer to the question, is it required. No, Can you do without one with the changes to come next year and the answer is also No. Take the time to visit a facility with a sensory room and you will know how important a sensory room is to quality of life for the low functioning resident. And if your administrator still won't allot the money, than begin fund raising because in the end, you will be proud you raised the money.

Alternative Solutions in Long Term Care www.activitytherapy.com carries a full line of sensory items, sensory room care plans, Sensory Room In-services and Sensory Room policy and procedures.

Happy Activity Professionals Week!

Alternative Solutions in Long Term Care
Lisa Reidinger LCSW, CTRS, CSW, CDP
Executive Director

Sandra Stimson CALA, ADC, CDP
Executive Director



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*Providing Internet Resources
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in Long Term Care Settings*
admin@theactivitydirectorsoffice.com

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