



"Freeze"

Freeze is a game used in theatre classes to warm actors up and encourage improvisational thinking. In the elderly population, it can go at their own pace and physical ability and still be just as much fun.

Have participants sit in a semi-circle. Two volunteers will begin by standing/sitting in front of their peers. The "audience" will suggest a location for them to begin the improvisation, such as "in the kitchen" or "on a space ship to the moon," (the more outlandish the better). The actors then quickly come up with motions and words that invent a scene in that location, for example, "OK, Margaret, I see the moon through the window. Are you ready for landing?" Meanwhile the actor is punching imaginary buttons and his counterpart is playing off his suggestions and peering out an imaginary window. The partner responds in kind, suggesting, "No, Bill, we can't land here, there's a giant elephant! What will they think back in Houston when they find out there's life on the moon!" They pantomime a rough landing with both actors shaking and swaying. Bill is sitting with arms outstretched as though steering the space ship and Margaret is holding onto the back of his chair with a look of fright on her face, and then...

An audience member calls out, "Freeze!" At this time the two actors freeze and the one who called "freeze" takes the place of whomever he chooses. Let's say the new actor, Tom, assumes Bill's position, but then he changes the scene. Tom then begins acting and calls out, "It's OK honey, we'll make it to the hospital in time, just remember to do your breathing!" or perhaps, "Hold on tight! The cops can't catch us! You hold onto that money tight, OK?!" Margaret then responds in her own creative fashion to the new scenario. At any point, an audience member can choose to call out freeze and take the place of either actor.

As you can see, this can be a fast paced, very fun game. The activity director serves as moderator to keep the game moving and offer suggestions. Ideally, it would be best to keep the game moving as fast paced as possible, allowing several minutes for each scene to develop before new players are added, and yet not so long that it becomes stale for those "on stage". If the actors seem to have played out their scene and the audience is having difficulty jumping in, the activity director can call freeze and offer suggestions. Additionally, if actions become inappropriate, the staff can call freeze to excuse a player.

To accommodate a population with varied levels of ability, the activity director/staff could allow for several rounds of quick play among more able-bodied clients, and then accommodate a slower client by calling freeze and asking the quieter client to join him/her as the other member of the pair, modeling inclusiveness to the others, and adjusting the imagined scenario to their level. Even for those who are unable to actively participate, watching the antics of their peers is much more interesting than daytime television!

Lastly, it would be best to end the game just as it has passed its peak of excitement, rather than waiting for the game to die out. This will keep the participants excited about the game and coming back for more.

Freeze is an excellent game to exercise the executive functioning of the frontal lobes. Participants pay apt attention looking for their opportunity to jump in, inhibit scenarios that are now switched, and plan and problem solve to invent new situations. It offsets depression by giving a strong dose of anticipatory excitement when they know that "Freeze" will be part of their day. Mimicking the imaginary play of childhood, clients don't realize that the fun they're having is actually exercising their brain.

