

Why Your Work Matters

Presented by Megan Dooley, OTD, OTR/L

Innovative Therapy Solutions & Consulting LLC



Objectives

1

Identify Your Impact

Understand how frontline care directly influences resident life expectancy, physical health, and emotional well-being through evidence-based insights.

2

Explain the Role of Connection

Articulate how staff interactions maintain resident dignity, support family dynamics, and create an environment of trust and safety.

3

Reflect on Your Contributions

Take time to consider your personal role in resident care and clearly articulate one meaningful reason why your work matters to you and those you serve.



Every moment Shapes Their World

Every action, word, and choice you make directly impacts a resident's health, comfort, and quality of life. From the gentle tone of your voice to the patience in your touch, these moments create experiences that foster their mood, willingness to participate, and overall sense of safety and belonging.

The Power of Presence



Reflection Question

How do residents respond differently when care is provided with calmness versus frustration?

Consider the immediate reactions you've witnessed —changes in body language, facial expressions, willingness to cooperate, or emotional state. Our residents are incredibly attuned to the emotional energy we bring into their rooms.



Discussion Focus: Guide conversation around emotional regulation, empathy, and how tone impacts trust and participation in care activities.

What Research Tells Us



Longer Life Expectancy

Consistent, compassionate care has been shown to extend life expectancy among long-term care residents by reducing stress and promoting overall health.



Cognitive Stability

Familiar routines, consistent voices, and predictable interactions improve cognitive function and slow decline in residents with dementia.



Reduced Distress

Dignity-centered care significantly reduces behavioral distress, agitation, and resistance to care activities.



Lower Stress Response

Touch, eye contact, and patience measurably lower cortisol and other stress hormones, promoting physical and emotional healing.

Dignity as Daily Practice



Use Preferred Names

Call residents by the name they've chosen, whether it's their first name, a nickname, or a formal title. Ask if you're unsure.



Offer Choices

Frame questions as choices: "Would you like to wear the blue shirt or the green one?" "Should we start with breakfast or getting dressed?"



Explain Before Acting

Always explain what you're about to do before touching or transferring a resident. Narrate your actions to maintain their sense of control.



Protect Privacy

Respect privacy even during busy routines —close doors, use curtains, cover residents appropriately, and knock before entering.



Connection = Care

A smile in the morning

The first face they see sets the tone for their entire day.

A shared laugh

Joy and humor remind residents they're still connected to life's pleasures.

A hand held in silence

Sometimes presence speaks louder than any words we could offer.

"The smallest act of care can change the entire course of someone's day."



The Ripple Effect

Your compassionate care doesn't exist in isolation —it creates waves that extend far beyond the immediate resident interaction. Each positive moment you create has the power to transform relationships, shift perceptions, and elevate the entire care environment.



Families

- Builds trust with family members.
- Eases their guilt about placement decisions.
- They notice every detail.



Coworkers

- Models compassion and respect.
- Sets a positive team tone.
- Creates a culture of excellence.



The Community

- Shapes perception of long-term care.
- Challenges stereotypes.
- Demonstrates quality care.

When Dignity is Lost

Critical Reflection

What are examples of when dignity can unintentionally be violated? How can we repair the situation in the moment and prevent it from happening again?



The Family Dynamic

Tone of Voice


Families notice whether you speak *to* residents or *at* them —whether your words convey respect or impatience, partnership or control.

Patience During Care

They observe how you handle challenges —whether you rush through resistance or take time to understand and respond to their loved one's needs.

Inclusion in Decisions

Families feel respected when you consult them, share observations, and treat them as valuable partners in their loved one's care journey.

 **Remember:** When families feel respected and included, they become powerful allies in care —advocating for staff, supporting interventions, and helping bridge communication gaps.

Team Reflection



Partner Activity

Take a few minutes to pair up or form small groups. This is your opportunity to celebrate the meaningful moments that often go unrecognized in the rush of daily care.

Reflection Questions:

- Share a specific moment when your interaction genuinely changed a resident's mood or altered the trajectory of their day.
- How did you know they felt safe or connected with you? What were the signs—verbal or nonverbal—that told you the interaction mattered?
- What did that moment teach you about the power of your presence?

📋 **Facilitator:** Allow 5-7 minutes for sharing. Invite volunteers to share highlights with the larger group if time permits.

Autonomy and Relationship

Autonomy: The Power of Choice

- Offer choices, even small ones (e.g., shirt color, meal location).
- Respect "no" as a complete answer.
- Reinforces sense of self and identity.

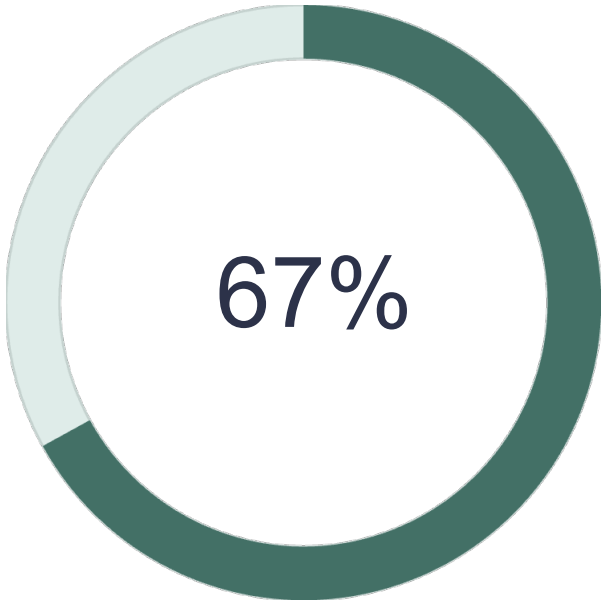
Relationship: Knowing Their Story

- Understand their history, preferences, fears, and joys.
- Recognize what matters to them (e.g., Mr. Johnson values structure, Mrs. Chen prefers female staff).
- Transforms care from generic to personalized.

Together, autonomy and relationship create **engagement** —the "E" that brings care to life and makes every interaction meaningful.

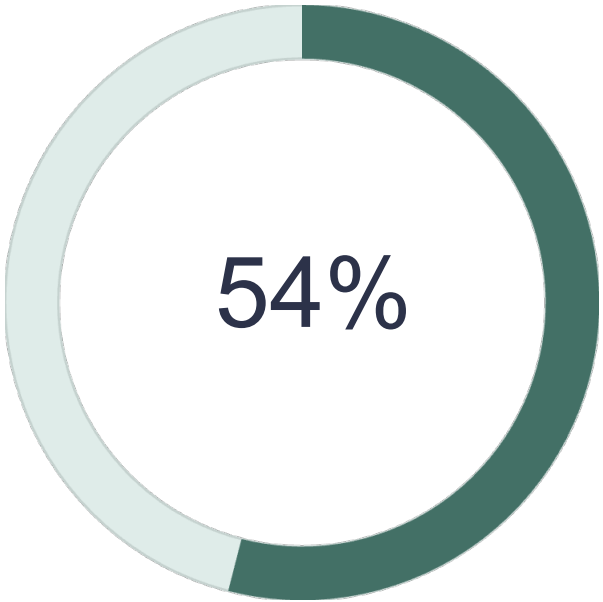
Why It Matters —For You Too

Person-centered care doesn't just benefit residents —it transforms the work experience for staff as well. When we connect to the purpose and meaning in our work, everything changes.



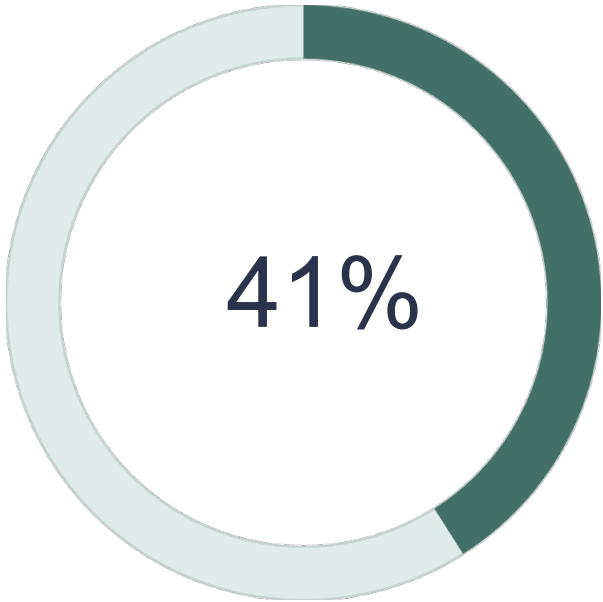
Reduced Burnout

Staff who feel their work has clear purpose and meaning report significantly less emotional exhaustion and burnout.



Improved Morale

Emotional connection and meaningful relationships with residents increase overall team morale and job satisfaction.



Better Cooperation

Meaningful care moments increase resident cooperation during care activities and reduce staff stress and physical strain.

When you understand the profound impact of your work, it's easier to find motivation during challenging shifts. When you see the difference you make, the hard days become more manageable. When you connect to purpose, you connect to resilience.

Reflection Exercise

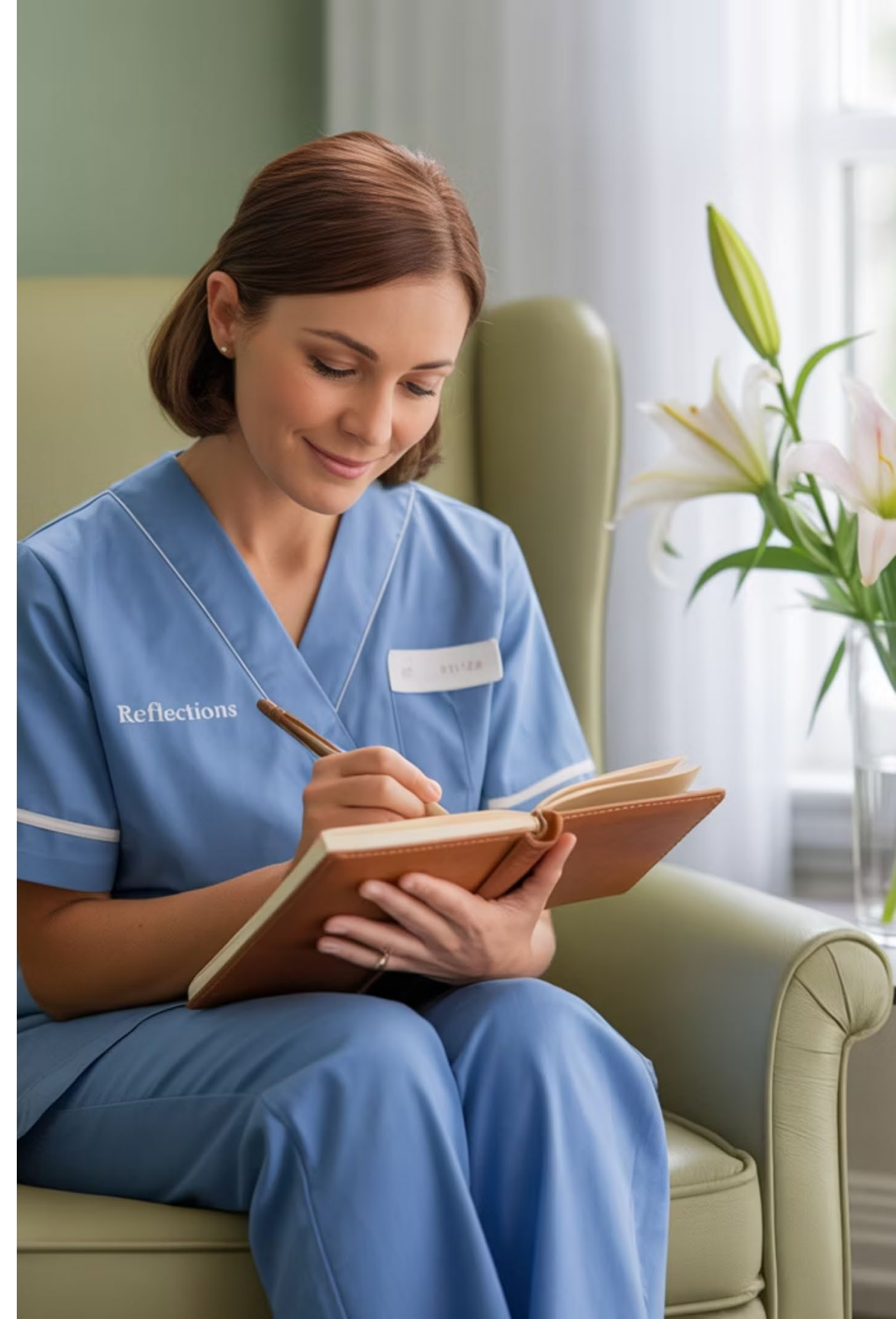
Take a quiet moment for yourself. This is your opportunity to articulate what often goes unspoken —the personal meaning you find in this challenging, essential work.

Personal Reflection

Complete this sentence in your own words, drawing from your experiences and values

"My work matters because..."

Optional: If you feel comfortable, we invite you to share your reflection aloud with the group before we close today's session.



You are the heartbeat of quality care

Your care is not just a task to complete or a box to check. It's a lifeline —a source of comfort, dignity, and humanity for people navigating one of life's most vulnerable chapters.

Every transfer you perform with patience. Every smile you offer in a moment of confusion. Every respectful choice you provide when someone feels powerless. Every time you see the person behind the diagnosis. **All of it matters.**

You bring light into spaces that can feel dark. You bring comfort into moments of fear. You bring dignity into an environment where it could easily be lost. This is not small work. This is essential, profound, life-changing work.

Thank you for everything you do. Your compassion makes all the difference.