

# *Playing Favorites*



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**W**hat are their favorites? Favorite drink? Favorite temperature of room? Favorite snack? Favorite ice cream? Favorite sweater? Favorite place to sit? Favorite person? Favorite tease? Favorite blanket? Favorite place to visit? Favorite subject to talk about? Favorite music?

When you find ANYTHING that causes a positive reaction, write it down and share it with everyone! Avoid writing general statements like, "My mom loves to talk about her brother." Write down specific statements such as, "You have an older brother named Richard. Richard was smarter than the rest. Wasn't he? He walked you to school everyday." Mail this list out to family and friends. It will help tremendously when they visit the person with dementia.

The following is an example of playing someone's favorites.

## ***Emily Johnson — Her Favorite Things***

- Her favorite snack is buttered popcorn with lots of salt
- Her friends call her “Em”
- When she asks, “Where’s my mom?”, the best response is “doing the chores” or “she’ll be right back”
- Favorite drink is chocolate milk
- Favorite painting is *Starry Night* by Van Gough
- Her favorite picture of her sister and brother when they were little is in the top drawer of the end table.
- “Em, you have gorgeous naturally curly hair.”
- “Hey ornery” and lightly jab Em in the shoulder. (It creates a smile)
- Favorite songs Perry Como “Catch a Falling Star,” “His Eye is on the Sparrow,” “There is No Secret,” and “Amazing Grace”
- Funny stories from *Readers Digest* make Em laugh
- Make sure the room is at least 69 degrees. If Emily is chilly get her green and purple afghan from the closet or her pink sweater. Em doesn’t like a warm room. Cool with extra clothing is her preference.
- Favorite snack is softserve ice cream (but loves any kind of ice cream except sherbert)
- Sleeps in medium weight pajamas
- Loves a drive through the countryside

Be sure to find at least 20 things that cause a positive reaction, then make copies of that list and give it to anyone and everyone who might be visiting or caring for the person.

*A community told me of a lady who had to use the bathroom every 20 minutes and they made a list of 20 things that caused a positive reaction. Each staff person was asked to do 5 things on the list during their shift. Guess what need went away? The need to use the bathroom every 20 minutes.*

When someone is screaming from their room, what are they seeking? Attention. When someone falls out of their wheelchair, what are they seeking? Attention. When someone is depressed in their room, what are they seeking? Attention. When we do these things on the list, what are we giving them? Attention.

When you are finding these treasures I encourage you not to play out in your head whether something will work or not. Your head is not your teacher, your co-workers are not your teacher, siblings are not your teacher, the state is not your teacher. The only person who can teach you what works and doesn't work is the person. So try everything! The person's facial reaction and body language will tell you everything you need to know at that moment.

*When you get older, joy comes from birds,  
flower beds, and young people.*

—Bruce and Rhea Fletcher