

*Foods to Share:
The Creation of Social Bonds*

Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

As a group, with family members, or one-on-one, list foods prepared specifically for sharing. Discuss the occasions for sharing these foods and also list them. Share memories about how these foods were made with others and how they were shared. Have participants list a particular dish, write down the recipe, and write at least one paragraph about the occasion for sharing the food (or participants can work with volunteers, family members, or staff to write this information). Create a “Dishes to Share” cookbook with a page or so for each dish and memory. Perhaps the participants’ children or grandchildren could use family photos that represent occasions for sharing.

TIME:

Three hours over three sessions.

MATERIALS:

- Paper
- Pens or pencils
- Colored pencils or markers
- Crayons (Consider using larger, pre-K-size crayons and pencils for those participants with visual or motor skills issues.)
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

Activities are designed to increase social interaction between individuals within the care facility and the elder residents’ families or outside community through the sharing of memories, recipes, and occasions when sociability and community were at the forefront. Loneliness and boredom will both be addressed by recalling times when family and friends were around. Including family and friends in the activity by collecting family pictures that depict the communal sharing of food encourages greater social interaction, thus addressing a sense of loneliness. Passing information and family/local traditions on to the next generation will help to address the sense of helplessness. Those physically unable to reproduce recipes and narratives can participate by recalling and retelling their own experiences sharing foods, describing ingredients, and instructing others on how they were made.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDY:

“Loneliness among community-dwelling older people is a common problem, with serious health consequences. [Thus,] the favourable [sic] processes and mediating factors of a psychosocial group rehabilitation intervention in alleviating older people’s loneliness were evaluated. Altogether, 117 lonely, home-dwelling individuals (aged ≥ 75 years) participated in a psychosocial group rehabilitation intervention. The content comprised [of] art and inspiring activities, group exercise and discussions, or therapeutic writing and group therapy.

“The psychosocial group rehabilitation intervention was evaluated from the group leaders’ diaries and by observing the groups. Experiences of loneliness and social participation were collected by post-intervention questionnaires from the participants. Data were analysed [sic] using methodological triangulation.

“[The results indicated that] doing things together and sharing experiences with their peers inspired lively discussions, created a feeling of togetherness, and led to participants’ empowerment and increased self-esteem. The intervention socially activated the participants, and their feelings of loneliness had been alleviated during the intervention. . . . The psychosocial group rehabilitation intervention gives nurses an effective tool to support older people’s psychosocial resources by activating them and alleviating their loneliness.” [Abstract]

*--Savikko, N., P. Routasalo, R. Tilvis, and K. Pitkälä.
“Psychosocial Group Rehabilitation for Lonely Older
People: Favourable Processes and Mediating Factors of the
Intervention Leading to Alleviated Loneliness.” International
Journal of Older People Nursing 5, no. 1 (March 2010): 16-24.*

Activity Plan

SESSION 1 (1 HOUR):

(More or less, depending on the number of participants.)

I. The person directing the activity should explain the following:

We share foods with others to create and re-enact community, to strengthen ties, and to enjoy being with one another. We do this on many occasions—in the fall, when we harvest foods together, prepare them together, and consume them together; for rites of passage, such as birthdays, anniversaries, and funerals; for holidays that celebrate our common heritage, such as Thanksgiving or the Fourth of July. For such occasions, foods do not just nourish our bodies. They also feed our spirits and regenerate our communities. When we make foods together, we also share stories and traditions of how they were made in the past, thus connecting generations present with those who have passed. The stories told about family members, about the ways of preparing certain dishes, and about the times when such foods were shared in the past further serve to strengthen traditions and help to ensure that they will be passed on to the next generation. Many families commemorate and preserve such occasions with photographs, which allow us to remember the occasions, the foods, and the stories that were told and shared at those gatherings.

This activity, as with others, encourages the participants of art activities to eat together before or after such occasions.

2. The person directing the activity should ask a series of questions to start the interaction and memory recollection process. This can be done as a group or one-on-one with volunteers, staff, or with the participants' family members and friends. Remember that the questions are to be asked in a way that encourages group discussion and interaction, not in an interview question-and-answer mode.

- On what occasions do you recall that your family or community shared food? What foods were commonly featured? For examples from the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, read aloud (or have participants read aloud):
 - folklore item “5. A Silver Dollar in the Bread,” page 196, Chapter 8
 - folklore item “8. A Fun Time for Everyone,” page 198, Chapter 8
 - folklore item “32. A German Thanksgiving,” page 210, Chapter 8

- What foods do you remember making with others? How did younger participants learn to make the foods in question? What rituals were associated with these foods? Read the following examples to help trigger memories:
 - folklore item “5. A Silver Dollar in the Bread,” page 196, Chapter 8
 - folklore item “46. The ‘*Opalatek*’ Tradition,” page 218, Chapter 8
 - folklore item “51. Anniversary Surprise Party,” page 219, Chapter 8
 - When special foods were made, which family or community members did which part (e.g., making sausages, tomato sauce or gravy, cookies, *lefse*)?
 - Sometimes, the foods to share are not always liked by everyone. However, it is the sharing that makes them special, rather than the food itself. In Scandinavian culture, *lutefisk* has taken on this role, usually at Thanksgiving, Christmas, or at special *lutefisk* suppers. Can you think of other foods like this? For examples, see:
 - folklore item “44. Oyster Stew,” page 218, Chapter 8
 - folklore item “16. Brains for Breakfast,” page 233, Chapter 9
 - folklore item “76. *Czarnina*,” page 282, Chapter 10
3. The activity director should ask participants to describe how one or more foods were made. Allow time for participants to share this

information.

- What ingredients were involved?
 - When was it made?
 - By whom was it made?
 - Who was in charge of making it?
 - How and from whom did you learn to make it?
 - Have you passed it on to your children, other family members, and/or community members?
4. Sometimes, family recipes do not get passed on. Do you recall any favorite foods that you wished you’d learned to make or to make the way they tasted when you were growing up? Read or refer to the following examples:
- folklore item “50. More Chicken Soup,” page 219, Chapter 8
 - folklore item “78. Norwegian Flat Bread,” page 283, Chapter 10
5. Ask participants to list a few of their favorite foods to share and write down as best they can the ingredients involved. Have them describe how the food was prepared and the occasion for sharing. This information should then be brought to the next meeting. If individuals cannot write themselves, perhaps a volunteer or family member could be involved to take dictation. Exact measurements are not necessary; terms like “handful” or “bunch” are just fine. Some participants may have photos of such foods and/or the occasions for sharing them and should be encouraged to bring those along to the next meeting.

SESSION 2 (1 TO 2 HOURS):

(Depending on the number of participants.)

1. As per Session 1, #5, ask each participant to tell the group about one of his or her favorite foods to share and the occasion for sharing. Hand out paper and writing implements to each participant for the next step.

2. As per Session 1, #5, the participants, with the help of volunteers, family, or community members, should write down their recipes, including the ingredients. Combined with the descriptions of the occasions for sharing, participants now have the basis for a collection of community sharing traditions and recipes. Participants should also explain how they learned to make the dishes and from whom they learned them.

3. Have volunteers, staff, or the residents' family members type the recipes and memories, as well as scan the photos that are relevant to each of them. Compile the collection and make copies for everyone involved.

4. Other ways to spark participation and/or create a written collection:

- Anecdotes about disliked foods:
 - As per Session 1, #2, last bullet, ask participants to tell family or personal stories about special foods they *didn't* like and how they avoided having to eat them. This is likely to be particularly fun for grandchildren to hear.
 - Hand out paper and have participants write down their

anecdotes. For those who aren't physically able to do this, family members, staff, or volunteers could do so. Anecdotes could be collected, typed up, and compiled into a collection, with copies being made for everyone involved.

- Stories about foods whose recipes did not get passed down:
 - As per Session 1, #4, have participants note again those foods they did not learn how to make and now wish they had. Have them tell why these foods were so important. If participants did try to recreate/reproduce those foods, have them recount the trial and error process and note whether they were successful.
 - Hand out paper and have participants write down their stories. For those who aren't physically able to do this, family members, staff, or volunteers could do so. Stories could be collected, typed up, and compiled into a collection, with copies being made for everyone involved. Sometimes memories of what can't be revisited can be more important as a legacy for family members than those that can be.

5. Optional: Perhaps kitchen staff, volunteers, family, and/or community members could prepare some of the dishes from the recipes provided, or bring some of their own to share with participants for the final meeting. If others involved are agreeable, participants could vote on which of the various dishes they would like the staff, volunteers, or family members to make and share for Session 3.

6. Additional and related folk arts program to consider: If the agreed-upon dish is related to certain holidays or other traditional arts (like community dances), when the dish is served, perhaps various items associated with that particular occasion could be used and traditional artists (like fiddlers who play for dances) could perform. For example, see folklore item “51. Anniversary Surprise Party” on page 219 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.

SESSION 3 (1 TO 2 HOURS):

(Depending on the number of participants and what is prepared before this meeting.)

1. The activity director and/or participants should share copies of the completed collection with other residents and family members.
2. The activity director should display original photos with recipes and sharing occasion descriptions for all to see.
3. Optional, as per Session 2, #5: Everyone present should try the agreed-upon dish (or dishes) to share. If there are multiple dishes instead of just the one, those who brought the dishes should explain what their dish is, how they learned to make it, and for what occasion they made it.
4. See Session 2, #6 for suggestions to expand and further contextualize Session 3 with other traditional art forms.

Explanatory Comments: Accessing as many of the five senses (taste, smell, touch, sight, and hearing) as possible is important in stimulating the elders’ creativity. The senses also can initiate physiologic and emotional responses. For instance, taste and smell can help to recall memories and excite physiologic and emotional responses. Visual observations can aid in color selection of artwork, and so on. Thus, provide coffee, tea, other beverages, or snacks—but especially some of the foods referenced in the activity plan or in the discussions with the elders.

AUTHOR • DR. RACHELLE H. (RIKI) SALTZMAN:

Dr. Saltzman was previously the Folklife Coordinator for the Iowa Arts Council and is currently the Director of the Oregon Folklife Network at the University of Oregon in Eugene. She provides assistance with multicultural, accessibility, and diversity issues; project development; event planning and implementation; presentation of traditional arts and artists; grant writing; and curriculum content. She has created award-winning online folklife curricula, worked with Iowa Public Radio to produce *Iowa Roots*, and was funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University to research and develop the website Iowa Place-Based Food. Since 1982, she has worked in the field of public folklore at private nonprofit and state agencies. Saltzman has written numerous articles, served on national boards, and authored *A Lark for the Sake of Their Country: The 1926 General Strike Volunteers in Folklore and Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2012).