

VIDEO 1 ~ REMEMBERING WASH DAYS

Introduction: This video encourages reminiscence of the work involved in washing and drying. We look at the history of washing and how it has evolved over the last century.

Before you start your reminiscence session, make sure you understand the dynamic of your group; some residents will find the material relevant to their own life, but for others it will evoke memories of their parents or even their grandparents. Make sure you include everyone. Encourage your residents to share their stories and 'educate' their carers about the topic; contributing to discussions and sharing knowledge is an empowering experience for them.

Background: In the past, most households would do all the washing on a particular day of the week (often Monday). Due to the manual nature of the process, it was a lengthy task that could take all day from start to finish. It was hard work – arms would ache from the repetitive motions, and hands would feel sore. Many people would use a hand cream such as *Atrixo* to protect and soothe their skin.

Drying laundry could be problematic on wet days. In the summer months, laundry would be hung on a clothesline outdoors. During the winter months, clothes would need to dry near the fireplace.

Wool would shrink if washed in water that was too hot or if it was left to soak for too long. Woollen items would be washed gently by hand. Then they would be laid flat between two towels to dry, as hanging on a line would cause stretching.

Setting your scene: As always, aim to gather some props to use as visual aids and prompts for reminiscence. The following is a list of everyday items that you should have to hand in time for your session: a clothesline and/or airer; an assortment of socks, napkins and tea towels; traditional wooden clothes pegs; colourful plastic clothes pegs; a laundry basket; laundry detergents and/or powder; housecoats and/or pinafore aprons; headscarves.

Download and print the accompanying set of reminiscence images for this video.

Activity ideas: Sorting pegs into colours; pairing socks; folding napkins and tea towels; pegging items onto a clothesline or airer; fastening a headscarf; hand massage using cream.

Questions: Which day did you do your washing on? Was it the same every week? How long did the washing take you? Which was the hardest part? Which part did you enjoy? Did you handwash certain items? How did you dry your laundry? Did you have an outdoor clothes line? What did you do on wet days? What sort of pegs did you use? Did you peg garments by 'the tails' or 'the collars'? What do you think of modern washing and drying methods? What are the pros and cons of using electric tumble dryers? (*pros – speed, convenience, save time, cons – expensive, waste electricity*) Was a man ever involved in wash day? Which household tasks do you remember a man doing? Do you think men are likely to do more household jobs nowadays?