



Bathing Without a Battle

by Jill Lorentz



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If you love a person with Alzheimer's you have probably had a battle of bathing and poor hygiene more than once. Are you frustrated? I have some ideas to help calm your frayed nerves and ways to get the job accomplished so everyone feels better! Let's get to it!



Washing is a private activity, it does not usually involve another person. Have knowledge if possible, of when that person bathed and how. Was it a bath or shower? Morning or night? Be flexible and always allow a lot of time for this event. Never RUSH!

Before you begin, throw towels in a dryer for 20 minutes. 5 minutes before you begin, set several LED Candles in the bathroom and start the shower to warm the room. Use a hand wand, if possible. Have a robe and slippers, or a change of clothes ready in the room before you begin. Have scented soap available for a SPA like experience. Men may enjoy OLD SPICE or a familiar smell they are familiar with. Have several hand towels bath towels and wash clothes nearby on the commode or towel rack. If possible turn a seat in the shower around to face away from the water flow. People with dementia (PWD's) are often fearful of water flowing down. Also put a warm light-colored towel on the seat for warmth and so they can see it. Keep the door closed to keep the room warm.

Bottom line, create a soothing atmosphere. Use aroma therapy or soft music. Install hand rails for easy assistance and safety.

Approach the person when they are calm and content.

Move to a level where you are lower than they are and reach out your hand for a palm to palm connection. Reach out to their dominant side because muscle memory is strongest on that side.

Instead of naming the activity, start a conversation that is calming. While you are doing this, tell the PWD that you have something to show them that they will enjoy. Ask them to



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follow you. Use a light charming conversation to peak their interest. If someone who was in the military and they have progressed Alzheimer's type dementia tell them a Colonel is coming for an inspection as an example and you need to get "ready." If it's a lady, use the Spa techniques or tell them you are getting them ready for a lovely lunch or dinner with girlfriends etc. This works with men as well. Have one of the warm towels with you to hand to them. It smells and feels good, and affects their sensory levels in easy fashion.



When you get to the bedroom, tell them it's time to freshen up. To undress, go very slowly. Ask if the PWD needs assistance taking off their shirt. If they say no, wait for them to begin, and if they stall, ask if you can start with the top button. If they have on a pull over suggest they pull the shirt up and over their head, by speaking slowly and gently pulling the shirt in the upward position. Drape towels around them to keep them warm and content.

If they balk at taking off underwear, don't push. If it gets wet in the shower, they may agree to remove it. Use towels to cover their private parts, that you pulled from the dryer. Always be thoughtful about their feelings; use compassion and thoughtful intentions.

Speak in a calm quiet and slow manner the entire time. Tell the PWD what you are doing at every step. **DO NOT SOUND BOSSY or LOSE YOUR TEMPER.**

Start washing by telling them you are going to softly apply water to their feet. Ask them how the temperature feels. Ask if it feels GOOD. Allow them to take the wand and wet and wash their legs. You can make a wash cloth wet and soapy and hand it to them. Instruct them where to wash if needed. Place warm towels over limbs that have been washed so they are not cold. Keep private parts covered as much as possible.



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Provide encouraging words as often as possible. Great job, nice, thanks for letting me help you! I love you so much! Your hair is so pretty, let's wash it and style for you today so you look like a princess. We can trim up your hair when we get out of the shower dad so you look handsome! Use a nice smelling shampoo and possibly a cup to encourage gentle washing of the hair.

Bathing can be done once or twice a week and sponge bathes can be done throughout the week if the person has oily hair or sweats a lot. Bathing does not need to be a battle. You should make this a routine from the beginning so it does not become a fearful experience.

