



A Montessori-inspired Visitor Center in a long-term care residence is intentionally designed to shift family visits away from “just sitting and talking” — which can be hard for people with dementia — toward doing things together that are purposeful, fun, and relationship-building.

Instead of putting pressure on the person to carry a conversation, the environment offers ready-to-use activities that give everyone something natural to focus on, handle, look at, sort, arrange, reminisce about, or enjoy together. This makes visits feel less awkward and more successful, especially when words are difficult or attention is limited.

The goal is to help families share meaningful moments while supporting the resident’s abilities, interests, identity, and sense of connection.

Here's what it may look like:

A Visitor Center looks less like a “recreation closet” and more like a hands-on hospitality nook or room, curated to make family visits smoother, more engaging, and rooted in Montessori principles of purpose, independence, and shared activity.

Physical Setup

- **Location:** Usually, a small, dedicated room, alcove, or clearly defined corner of a common area. Positioned so it's easy for families to find when they arrive.
- **Design:** Warm, uncluttered, and welcoming. Furniture is arranged to invite **side-by-side activity**, not just face-to-face conversation.
- **Signage:** A clear, dementia-friendly sign (e.g., *Visitor Center – “Things to Do Together”*).

Contents & Materials

- **Activity Kits / Bins** (clearly labeled and easy to grab)
 - Folding laundry basket (with towels or cloths)
 - Sorting activities (buttons, cards, silverware)
 - Puzzles with large pieces
 - Art/craft materials (coloring, simple painting, collage)
 - Sensory bins (fabric swatches, nature items, shells)
- **Shared Purpose Activities**
 - Snack prep (basket with napkins, cups, or fruit)
 - Plant care kit (watering can, spray bottle, cloths)
 - Simple office tasks (envelopes to stuff, papers to sort, stamps)
 - Seasonal kits (decorate cookies, write holiday cards, arrange flowers)

Visitor Centers

- **Memory & Conversation Starters**
 - Photo books or “memory boxes”
 - Music player with pre-loaded playlists
 - Board games or cards simplified for success

How It’s Used

- Families are encouraged upon arrival: *“Feel free to pick an activity from the Visitor Center to enjoy with your loved one.”*
- Staff may help match an activity with the resident’s known interests.
- The center reduces awkwardness and gives families a natural “something to do” that feels meaningful.
- Activities are chosen to maximize **engagement, success, and dignity** — not childlike play.

Example in Practice

A granddaughter arrives to visit her grandmother. Instead of sitting silently or struggling for conversation, she goes to the Visitor Center, grabs the **flower arranging kit**, and they spend the visit cutting stems, placing flowers in vases, and chatting naturally as they work side-by-side.



When finished, they place the flowers in the dining room, giving the grandmother a sense of contribution and pride.

If you want to create a Montessori inspired **Visitor Center** in a long-term care residence, here's an **inventory list to get you started**:

1. Purposeful Household Roles

- Folding basket with hand towels or napkins
- Cutlery sorting tray (plastic or metal, depending on safety)
- Simple matching or pairing tasks (socks, gloves, cards)
- “Office” kit: envelopes, stamps (real or pretend), pens, papers
- Plant care kit: small watering can, spray bottle, cloths

2. Creative & Expressive Activities

- Adult coloring books with large-print designs + pencil crayons
- Collage kit (pre-cut pictures, glue sticks, paper)
- Seasonal craft bin (holiday cards, cookie decorating, flower arranging)
- Playdough or clay for tactile creativity
- Beading or stringing (large-hole beads for accessibility)

3. Memory & Reminiscence Starters

- Photo albums with “everyday life” themes (gardens, kitchens, holidays)
- Themed memory boxes (sewing kit, fishing gear, travel trinkets, baby items)
- Familiar music player (pre-loaded playlists: big band, folk, hymns, etc.)
- Conversation starter cards with simple prompts (e.g., “*What was your first job?*”)



4. Social & Game Kits

- Large-piece jigsaw puzzles (24–48 pieces, familiar images)
- Oversized playing cards (Go Fish, simple matching games)

Visitor Centers

- Dominoes or checkers with large, tactile pieces
- Balloon or beach ball (for seated toss games)
- Bingo set (large cards, bold numbers)

5. Sensory & Relaxation Options

- Fabric swatch bin (silks, flannels, lace, denim, wool)
- Nature basket (shells, pinecones, smooth stones, lavender sachets)
- Hand massage kit (lotion, soft towel)
- Aromatherapy jars (vanilla, cinnamon, citrus, lavender)
- Tactile fidgets (stress balls, soft blocks, textured rings)

6. Practical Setup Tools

- Sturdy shelving or cubbies with clear bins
- Large-print, high-contrast labels (both text + icons)
- A simple “Visitor Guide” sign: *“Choose an activity to share with your loved one.”*
- Rotation plan (e.g., refresh bins weekly so visits feel fresh)



Tips for Success:

- Keep activities failure-free, with no “right or wrong” outcome.
- Choose adult-appropriate materials — avoid anything childlike.
- Make sure every kit is ready-to-go, with no missing pieces and easy setup.
- Encourage staff to model or suggest activities at the start of visits.
- Offer a range of activity levels, from very simple observation-based activities to more active hands-on options.
- Include activities that work even when conversation is limited, such as sorting, looking through photos, folding, matching, music, or sensory materials.
- Use clear labels and simple instructions so families do not need to ask staff how to begin.
- Keep materials visible and inviting, not hidden away in cupboards.
- Rotate items regularly so the Visitor Center feels fresh and worth returning to.
- Include familiar, adult life themes such as gardening, cooking, travel, sports, pets, music, tools, fashion, cars, babies, nature, or local history.
- Avoid overstimulating the space; too many choices at once can feel confusing.
- Provide a few “quick-start” activities that can be done in 5–10 minutes.
- Make sure activities can be used by visitors of different ages, including children visiting with parents.
- Include some activities that invite contribution, such as folding napkins, sorting greeting cards, assembling simple kits, or helping prepare decorations.
- Check supplies daily or weekly so the area does not become messy, depleted, or forgotten.

Visitor Centers

- Add a small sign that reassures families: “You do not need to lead a perfect visit. Just choose something and enjoy the time together.”
 - Encourage staff to notice what residents respond to and adjust the kits over time.
 - Keep sanitation and safety in mind, especially for shared items, small pieces, food-related materials, or sensory objects.
 - Use real objects whenever possible, not just worksheets or printed pages.
 - Create a few themed kits for different interests, such as “Garden Chat,” “Classic Cars,” “Kitchen Memories,” “Music Moments,” or “Family Photo Prompts.”
 - Place chairs so visitors can sit beside the resident, not across from them like an interview.
 - Include activities suitable for residents with more advanced dementia, where the visitor can do most of the handling while the resident watches, touches, listens, or responds.
 - Make the space feel like an invitation, not a program requirement.
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December Visitor Centers

You may have heard us talk about *December Visitor Centers*.

In Montessori Inspired Lifestyle® (MIL) residences, Visitor Centers are available all year long. They are a permanent feature of the home—calm, welcoming spaces where families can find simple, hands-on

activity kits designed to support meaningful visits with their loved ones.

These kits are always available, always self-serve, and always meant to make visiting easier, less pressured, and more purposeful.

In December, we can create a **seasonal version** of this space—the **December Visitor Center**—to reflect the holidays and the **emotional needs** of residents, families, and staff at this time of year.

It is the same concept, simply enhanced with a gentle Christmas or winter theme.

The kits remain **simple, familiar, purposeful, safe, and sensory-friendly**. Each includes clear, easy-to-follow instructions so families can enjoy shared activities without needing staff assistance.

The focus is on gentle engagement—never overstimulation.

These seasonal kits give families an easy way to connect, even on days when conversation is difficult or attention spans are short. They help create calm, meaningful moments during a month that can feel emotional or overwhelming.

The December Visitor Center supports visiting that feels warm, personal, and enjoyable for everyone, while staying true to Montessori principles and to the needs of people living with dementia.

Here are some 'kit' ideas for your December Visitor Center...

All kits are dementia-friendly and low-prep.

1. Holiday Card-Making & Signing Kit

Purpose: Connect through a familiar, simple, hand-use activity.

Contents:

- Pre-folded blank cards in winter/Christmas designs (avoid glitter)
- Large felt-tip pens (dark blue/black)
- Stickers (snowflakes, stars, Rudolph, Santa, snowmen, evergreen branches, presents)
- Template messages printed in large font
- Envelopes + pre-printed "To:" labels

Instructions (for families): "Help your loved one select a card and decorate it together. You can sign the card for them using their own words or short phrases."

2. Ornament-Assembling Kit (Non-glass, Safe Materials)

Purpose: Provide a simple, hands-on, seasonal task.

Contents:

- Pre-cut wooden ornaments (stars, trees, circles)
- Markers (non-toxic)
- Ribbons pre-cut
- Stick-on gems
- Optional: pre-glued seasonal scents (vanilla, pine)

Instructions: "Choose an ornament and decorate it together. Your loved one may enjoy placing stickers or threading the ribbon. Finished ornaments can hang in their room."



[Click here for more ideas on our website.](#)

Disclaimer

The information and activity ideas in this eBook are provided for general educational and planning purposes only.

They are not intended to replace the policies, procedures, clinical judgment, infection prevention and control practices, safety protocols, or regulatory requirements of any long-term care residence or care organization.

Before using any Visitor Center activity, kit, material, or setup, each residence is responsible for determining whether it is appropriate and safe for its residents, staff, families, and care environment. This includes considering resident abilities, care plans, supervision needs, allergies, choking hazards, fall risks, sanitation requirements, shared-item cleaning, food safety, privacy, infection control, and applicable provincial, territorial, local, and organizational requirements.

Activities should be modified, substituted, restricted, or removed whenever they are not suitable for a resident, setting, or policy requirement.

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MDC Montessori Dementia Ctr. - Visitor Center