The Positive Power of the Mature Mind (based on book by Dr. Gene Cohen, MD, PhD)

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At a Glance:
- This program focuses on ways to continue brain growth as we age. It includes a PowerPoint presentation about the subject as well as interaction with brain games and an exercise in which participants will make a plan for engaging in activities to maximize brain growth.

Time Required:
- 45 minutes to an hour

Core Message(s):
- The human brain continues to grow and develop throughout life.
- The mature brain has some distinct advantages over younger brains.
- The healthy mature brain does not normally experience decline.
- Individuals can keep their brains agile with mental and physical exercise.

Objectives:
- Disseminate new brain research information on the mature mind
- Introduce brain games to participants
- Engage participants in activities to grow new brain connections
- Provide additional resources for participants who wish to learn more about mature mind growth
- Establish a prioritized list of activities participants will try to increase their brain power

Outcomes:
- Participants will make a plan for exercising their minds through cognitive, physical, social, and creative activities.

Materials Needed:
- Presentation: The Positive Power of the Mature Brain (PowerPoint presentation)
- Handouts:
  - The Mature Brain - includes URL for brain-building games
  - Challenge list for participants to develop a plan to try new activities for brain growth.
  - Printed word games if Internet is not available.
- Laptop computer with internet connectivity (if internet is not available, links to word games that can be printed and distributed to participants is provided in the getting ready section or you can download some of the games to your computer for demonstrations)
- Multi-media projector and screen or blank wall for showing the PowerPoint presentation.
- I-Pad or other handheld tablet or smart phone (optional)
- Paper and pens or pencils for participants
- Copy of the book "The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain" by Gene D. Cohen, M.D., Ph.D. (optional - these were
provided to participants at the 2010 FCS Professional Development Conference

**Getting Ready**

- Study the information in the section "For Your Information" and/or read the book "The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain" by Gene D. Cohen, M.D., Ph.D
- Become familiar with the PowerPoint presentation and print off the notes pages to be used as your script.
- This program works best with access to internet. **Check with the site where your meeting will be held to see if Internet access is available.** If Internet is available onsite, preload two of the website URLs listed below
  - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA1X87FsUJo&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA1X87FsUJo&feature=related)
- If the Internet is not available, print off some of the word games at the links listed below so that each participant can have at least one copy of a brain stimulating game or activity.
  - [http://www.puzzlechoice.com/pc/Puzzle_Choicex.html](http://www.puzzlechoice.com/pc/Puzzle_Choicex.html)
- Print enough copies of the other handouts for each participant.
- Secure paper and pens or pencils for each participant.
- Secure a hand-held tablet or Smart Phone (optional).
An excellent book that you can read to provide you with a rich background in positive aging is the book The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain by Gene D. Cohen, M.D., Ph.D. (these were provided to participants at the 2010 FCS Professional Development Conference). If possible, make time to read this book before presenting this program. Below is a short summary of information from the book that specifically focuses on content related to this program.

The term aging often provokes thoughts about the negative aspects of growing older. We seldom think about the positive aspects of increased age such as knowledge and wisdom that can lead to better decision-making. New brain research is providing insight into the power of the brain for growth and development throughout life. When we understand the potential for positive change, we can face the future with hope and optimism, and we can take steps to increase our chances of experiencing healthy and productive aging.

The brain not only has the capacity to form new memories, but it can actually grow new brain cells throughout life. Additionally, older brains are more adept at using both sides (lobes or hemispheres) to solve problems, in comparison to younger brains, which are often prone to one-sidedness in accomplishing tasks.

One feature of the mature mind is its ability for advanced thinking. Some examples of advanced thinking include:

- recognition that some problems are not black and white, that there may be many solutions, or none that completely address the problem;
- being able to look at things from more than one perspective and suspending judgment until perspectives have been explored carefully; and
- being able to see the larger picture and to anticipate potential long-term consequences to decisions.

Exercise, both mental and physical, is a key to healthy aging of the brain. Physical exercise, especially aerobic activities, provides the brain with increased oxygen and blood flow. It also enhances production of serotonin, the feel good chemical. Because physical exercise tends to reduce levels of stress, it helps the brain maintain growth. Stress reduces the ability of the brain to grow new cells in certain parts.

Another way to exercise the brain is to engage in novel and challenging experiences. New experiences help the brain to generate new connections that improve memory and information processing.
You can stimulate your mind by taking a course at a local college, participating in a book club, taking an art class, acting or working backstage in a community theater, taking dance lessons, learning a new language, and volunteering in programs that challenge your mind such as serving as a guide at a local museum, tutoring, or mentoring a younger adult.

Another way to challenge your brain is to do old things in a new way. Use your non-dominant hand to do things such as brushing your teeth, buttering your bread, using the computer mouse, writing your name, or drawing a picture. Using your opposite hand will strengthen neural connections in your brain, and even grow new ones. It’s similar to how physical exercise improves your body’s functioning and grows muscles. Here is a reference:

There are other fun ways to stimulate your brain, such as working crossword or Sudoku puzzles, playing brain games on the computer, and playing board games that require strategy and decision-making skills.

Social networks are extremely important to health. Strong social connections in the second half of life have been associated with reduced blood pressure and lower levels of stress and loneliness. Each of these in turn can reduce adverse health effects such as long recovery times, frequent visits to physicians, poor dental health, and nursing home admissions. As people age, their social networks may shrink when friends or family members move, become ill, or die. Reductions in mobility and health issues may limit the abilities of some people to join groups. It takes effort to maintain current networks and to build new networks. For people with limited mobility, technology such as e-mail, Skype, social networking, and smart phones can keep people connected, even from a distance. Also, programs like meals on wheels and senior assistance programs are just as important for the social contact they provide as for the services they may render. If you are able to get out of the house, look for groups of people with similar interests to join. Senior Centers and houses of worship often have programs specifically for older adults. If you can’t find what you want, try starting your own group.

Growing older is not a sentence to a life of failing memories and ill health. Though we can’t control everything in our lives, we can take actions that will improve our chances for a long and enjoyable life. We can engage in physical and mental exercise, maintain or increase our social networks, learn something new daily, learn to master at least one skill, and unleash our creativity.

- **POST** provides a better means to identify and respect patient’s wishes
- **POST** completions will improve end-of-life care throughout the system
- The **POST** Form can be found at the following websites:
In today's program, we are going to talk about “The Positive Power of the Mature Mind.” We will learn about the advantages of the mature mind and how we can keep our brains active and growing through our mature years.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Welcome:
Ask participants what they think of when they hear the term “Aging.” Allow them to share both positive and negative words and phrases. Remark that a lot of our thoughts regarding aging are based on myths and misinformation. Point out that today’s lesson focuses on the positive aspects of aging and ways to maintain and even increase our brain power as we age.

Anchor:
Pass out paper and pencil to audience members. Ask the audience to stand. Ask them to cross their arms. Ask them to look down to see which arm is on top (left or right). Now, ask them to uncross their arms. Relax. Ask them to cross their arms placing the OTHER arm on the top. (Note: This feels really awkward).

While the audience is still standing, ask them pick up a pencil or pen with their NON-DOMINANT hand. (eg. Pick up pen with right hand if they are left handed). Ask them to write their name using their NON-DOMINANT HAND.

Explain that exercising your brain can feel a little like these two activities. You must THINK to change the way you normally do things or perhaps try something completely NEW to build brain cells.

Add:

Apply:
At the appropriate time in the presentation, access the online games for increasing brain-power (www.parade.com/braingames or http://www.lumosity.com/brain-games/flexibility-games/word-bubbles). Allow volunteers to try out different games to show how they work. You may need to demonstrate the first game. Try not to go too fast as that may frustrate participants who are trying to follow what you are doing. If Internet is not available, pass out the games that you printed off for each of the participants along with the handout that includes the URLs for online games.
At the appropriate time in the presentation, open the site at the URL http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA1X87FsUJ0&feature=related and ask for a show of hands from participants if they think the dancer is spinning clockwise. Ask for a show of hands indicating how many see her spinning counter-clockwise. Ask if they can watch the image and get her to reverse directions. Talk about what this says about which side of the brain is dominant for them (clockwise is right-brain (creative domain) dominant, and counterclockwise is left-brain (logic and reason domain) dominant). The ability to see the dancer switch directions is an example of being able to switch to the other side of the brain to solve a problem. Explain that older adults often use both sides of their brains to solve problems that are solved using only one side of the brain in younger adults. This is an advantage that older brains have over younger minds; we can solve problems from more different angles because of our accumulated experience and knowledge.

Distribute the handout, The Mature Brain, and ask participants to list two or three ideas in each section of the handout. If time allows, ask participants to share their ideas with each other in small groups or as a large group.

**Review:**

Remember the following points from this presentation:

- The human brain continues to grow and develop throughout life.
- The mature brain has some distinct advantages over younger brains.
- The healthy mature brain does not normally experience decline.
- Individuals can keep their brains agile with mental and physical exercise.

**Away:**

Ask participants to try to do at least one of the activities they listed on their handout before the next meeting/session. Tell them that at the next session they will be asked to share with the group what they did and what they learned, if they are willing.

**ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Bring along a smart phone, or an iPod, or iPad. Encourage participants who have not interacted with these devices to do something with them: turn on and off, select an app to explore, take a picture, listen to a song, look up something on the internet, etc. Encourage them to take advantage of classes where they can learn to use some of the new technology. Remind them of the benefits of using technology such as communicating with family members (especially grandchildren), doing genealogical research, reconnecting with old friends, and getting new information on just about any subject.