

## Bathroom / W.C.

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For many people with cognitive and sensory impairments, bathrooms and W.C.'s can be places that cause 'potential psychological trauma as they may induce as abnormal, awkward, frightening and undignified' places. These reactions are often caused when an individual user needs assistance with personal tasks, often resulting in the introduction of unfamiliar bathing aids and rails. Therefore, the design of an assistive bathroom should be constructed in familiar styles and materials to create a supportive environment with 'homelike' qualities.

### ■ How do you locate this room?



It is essential for rooms where a toilet is present to be made distinctive, so that they can be located easily and quickly for efficient use. Doors painted in a bright colour (red, orange yellow are ideal as they are the easiest to distinguish as the eye ages) and represented consistently are the most successful, as

individuals may come to associate that colour with the toilet. Another suggestion is to put a canopy over the door; a projected cue can be visible from greater distances at more angles. Appropriate signage is also imperative that uses both pictures (realistic not abstract) and bold text (dark lettering on a light background) is preferable.

### ■ Is there natural light or do you have to turn on a light?

If possible natural light in a bathroom/W.C. can create a pleasurable and warm atmosphere, preferably a balance between natural and controlled artificial light is favoured. Controlled artificial light enables maximum illumination in times of specific task activities whilst allowing for a dimmed light for a time of relaxation. Some people may also benefit from a constant low intensity light as a source of illumination at night, others may find this practice out of the ordinary.

### ■ Do you know how to switch on the light?

Be careful to select light switches whose use is obvious to the user. Some people suggest automatic light sensors that turn the light on upon entrance to the room; however some people may be frightened by this practice.

### ■ What is your first impression of this space?

### ■ Is it familiar and relaxing?

- Do you prefer a bath or shower?
- Do you know how to take a bath or a shower?

Sanitary fittings and fixtures should be of a style that is practical and easily recognisable to the user. The bath should have non-slip mat/strips on the base, and should be clearly defined by contrasting tiles around its perimeter to highlight its boundaries. Ideally the bath or shower should be able to be accessed from 3 sides. Some people may find half shower curtains to be preferable as it prevents feeling of claustrophobia.

- Can you access them?



The bathroom should provide an area big enough to provide adequate space for a wheelchair circle or hoist maneuver with additional space for 2 people to assist with equipment. A level access shower is preferable.

- Can you operate the shower from a seated position?

It is important that whilst an individual may no longer be able to stand to have a shower, that they be given the opportunity to remain as independent as possible by being given the chance to control their environment, which maintains remaining skills.

- Is there a wet floor?
- Does the light reflect off of the materials?



Floor materials should be non-slip with matte wall and floor finishes. These are preferred over shiny materials as reflected light can cause glare as well as increased amplification of sounds. This can be reduced through the use of materials such as padded sheet vinyl flooring that has a high sound absorbency.

The photograph adjacent (Iris Murdoch Centre public toilets) illustrates bright bold contrasting surfaces with even illumination across matte surfaces.

### ■ Is it a safe place?

A comfortable room temperature should be maintained at all times. Heat lamps are an ideal way of maintaining a warm temperature whilst avoiding potential accidents on other hot surfaces. Another option is under floor heating which can be thermostatically controlled.

Hot water temperature controls should be put in place, via thermostatic mixing valves, in order to maintain a safe water temperature. Tap temperatures should be made distinctive through the use of bright red and blue markings. Locks should be able to be disabled from the outside preventing any individual from getting locked in.

There should be no sharp corners in case of falls, and the toilet and sink should be positioned at a correct height that is easily adjustable.

### ■ Do you struggle to locate the toilet seat?



It is astonishing how many toilets in both private homes and public buildings fail to use contrasting toilet seats, a simple choice that greatly aids many people with cognitive and sensory impairments. A solid bright colour allows users confidence in where to sit. It has also been suggested that toilet water that has a dye through it can help men with their aim!

It is also beneficial to remove open wastepaper baskets as they can be mistaken and used as a toilet.

### ■ Can you get up and down easily?

As mentioned previously this project approaches accessibility as though all physical aspects have been addressed, so as to focus on cognitive and sensory impairments, however, appropriate handrails are essential in the bathroom/W.C and they are most beneficial when they can be located because they contrast significantly in the environment.

### ■ Do you know how to flush the toilet?

### ■ Who left the mess in the toilet?

Many contemporary toilets use a dual flush system, although the principle is good many people in older generations do not recognise this feature and as a result do not flush the toilet. This can cause frustration as people who have been vigilant in flushing the toilet throughout their lives can presume that someone else has been using their bathroom without their knowledge.

### ■ Do you remember to wash your hands?

Signage can be employed to remind the user the order in which they should use the W.C: toilet, toilet paper, flush, and wash hands.

- Do you know how to turn on the taps?

Age appropriate fittings are required, for example those with capstan heads, if however the twisting motion required by such fittings is no longer unachievable then alternative styles can be sampled to see what suits.

- Do you see the soap?



It is essential to implement good colour contrast throughout all aspects of the bathroom. Even toiletries such as soap can be overlooked if contrast is not made between itself and the sink (see adjacent photograph: Iris Murdoch). It is advised in the bath/shower area to create a soap recess, this benefits individuals should there be a fall.

- Do you recognise what you see in the mirror?

- Can the mirrors be removed?



Often those with cognitive impairments, such as dementia, become disorientated and confused with regards to time, place and sometimes even their own identity. On occasion particular individuals will be disturbed to see their reflection in a mirror, as they may no longer recognise it. Therefore, it is valuable to use mirrors that can be easily removed if necessary.

- Is there shelving for your personal toiletries

It is important that people occupy their space with familiar objects, consequently shelves should be made available for personal items which are in easy reach.

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<sup>i</sup> Brummett, W. (1997). *The Essence of Home: design solutions for assisted living housing*. P86