

Kitchen, Dining, Utility

Kitchen, dining and utility have been grouped together as that is how they are grouped in my familiar environment, however, you should think about how these spaces are represented and linked in your familiar settings.



The kitchen, dining, utility have perhaps one of the strongest connotations to 'home' for many people, with many referring to them as the 'heart of the home'. This is especially poignant for many women (esp. previous generations), as a place where food is prepared, meals eaten, families interact, as well as practical functions such as cleaning, sweeping, mopping, hanging out of clothes.

The therapeutic benefits of engaging participants in familiar homelike tasks include 'stimulation and challenge, ability maintenance and enhancing, casual opportunities for socialisation, connecting to fond and rewarding memories and an increased sense of productivity, value and belonging'.ⁱ

One of the most important aspects of a kitchen, dining and utility for someone with cognitive/sensory impairments is that it can aid the maintenance of their skills whilst encouraging participation for as long as possible in a safe and secure environment.

■ How are thresholds defined?

One way of defining thresholds or functional boundaries is with a change in colour of floor coverings to signify change, similar tones are ideal.

■ Can you tell it is the kitchen, dining, and utility area from outside?



It is preferable to have visual contact in and out of spaces, to trigger visual cues.

■ Can you smell anything from this space?

The sights and smells of cooking and baking reinforce a sense of home and of self. Sensory cues such as the smell of coffee in the morning or dinner being

made in the evening can inform an individual of the time of day and location of the kitchen/dining room.

■ Does it feel like a domestic space?

It is important that the style, layout and appliances are that of a domestic kitchen, dining and utility so that they are easily recognised for those whose memory is deteriorating, for example a freestanding cooker. This also applies when replacing appliances and kitchen units.

■ How do you know what are in the cupboards?

It has been found to be advantageous to make objects found in the kitchen visible for easy location and use. This can be achieved in several ways; commonly used items such as tea and coffee can be placed on top of the kitchen worktop in containers that have transparent lids, signs can be put on the cupboard doors marking the contents, or cupboard doors can be glazed to give visibility to items, or open shelves.

■ Can you reach?

It can be extremely unsafe for someone to struggle to reach a desired object, especially if they are elderly, therefore all immediate and regularly used items should be placed in a visible location on the worktop. Ironmongery should be easy to manipulate and large and contrasting enough to be seen.

■ Do you know how to make a cup of tea?



Can you find your cup? It has been recorded that if an individual's cup is changed to a different style or colour then it may no longer be recognisable to that person, therefore it is appropriate to replace such objects, that have particularly familiar connotations, like for like.

■ Is it possible to understand how the taps and cooker controls work?



As cognitive and sensory impairments affect the user's ability to correctly interpret situations, controls have to be put in place where there is a potential danger. Temperature controls can be put on the taps to ensure that scalding does not occur, as well as clearly labeling hot and cold with identifiable colours. Timing controls on the cooker can cause it to be switched off after an estimated maximum cooking time.

- Do you boil water in a kettle or on the stove?
- Does the kettle look like a kettle?

Kitchen appliances that we accept as normal such as a kettle have to be regarded from the position of the person that uses them. For example a women born 60-80 years ago (or in many developing countries) may commonly associate boiling water with a steel kettle on a stove as opposed to an electric one. In such cases it is recommended not to place a plastic electric kettle adjacent to the stove in case such a user puts it on the stove.

- Is there somewhere to sit in the kitchen?



As an individuals cognitive and sensory abilities deteriorate and they are no longer able to participate in all of the daily activities, it is necessary to provide a comfortable place to sit so that they might continue to experience such a setting as others use the kitchen, to experience the smell and noises. In addition, they may even be able to participate from a seated position.

- Are the seats comfortable to use?



Whether the dining area is open plan to the kitchen or in a separate room it is important to have comfortable chairs, which offer minimum drag, particularly if used on floor covering such as carpet. This can be achieved with chairs that have wheeled fittings on the rear legs to assist in the pushing in and out of chairs at the table.

- Do you know how to use your crockery and cutlery?



The photograph adjacent (Iris Murdoch Centre) illustrates the use of different coloured crockery; some research suggests that reds and oranges may even stimulate appetite. A variety of cutlery and crockery can be purchased which is ergonomically designed for ease of use, this may benefit those with sensory losses, enabling the enjoyment of dining independently for longer.

- How do you wash your dishes?

- Can you see the dishwasher?
- Do you know how to use the dishwasher?



If the user is used to using a dishwasher then a sign on the dishwasher illustrating its use can be helpful. If the user is used to washing their dishes in the sink then it is important to maintain a sink and taps which are familiar, for example a Belfast sink with high pillar taps with capstan heads. On some occasions individuals begin to find familiar fittings such as turn taps difficult to use, to which lever handles may prove easier to use, however, its use has to be understood.

- Do you know how to operate these machines?

If an individual's ability allows them to use appliances such as the washing machine then all efforts should be made to make them able, including a simplification of objects that are required and made obvious beside the machine. If their use is not permitted then it may be required to put a latch on the door of the washing machine/dryer to prevent alien objects being misplaced, if this still fails then the appliance may need to be switched off at the mains.

- Are there dangerous substance in the Kitchen/Utility?

When a person's cognitive impairments cause them to no longer correctly identify particular objects then it may be necessary to lock hazardous materials in a cupboard, in case they are misunderstood as food or drink. It is appropriate to use a lock that is discrete so as not to cause frustration.

- What is the Future of the Kitchen?

The ambient kitchen is a project through which the exploration of use of persuasive computing can be used for assisted living. It uses sensors and displays to store personal data and provide useful information. It effectively uses the embedded sensors located throughout the kitchen become aware of how appliances, utensils etc are being used. Any changes in location of items can be monitored, and pressure sensitive floors can track people's movements. Projectors are integrated into the workbenches and they display contextual information, such as nutritional information or recipes on the kitchen work surface. Efforts are being made not to affect the aesthetics of the environment so as to maintain familiarityⁱⁱ.

ⁱ Cohen, U., & Weisman, G. (1991). *Holding onto Home*

ⁱⁱ Oliver, P. The Ambient Kitchen – Culture Lab, Newcastle University