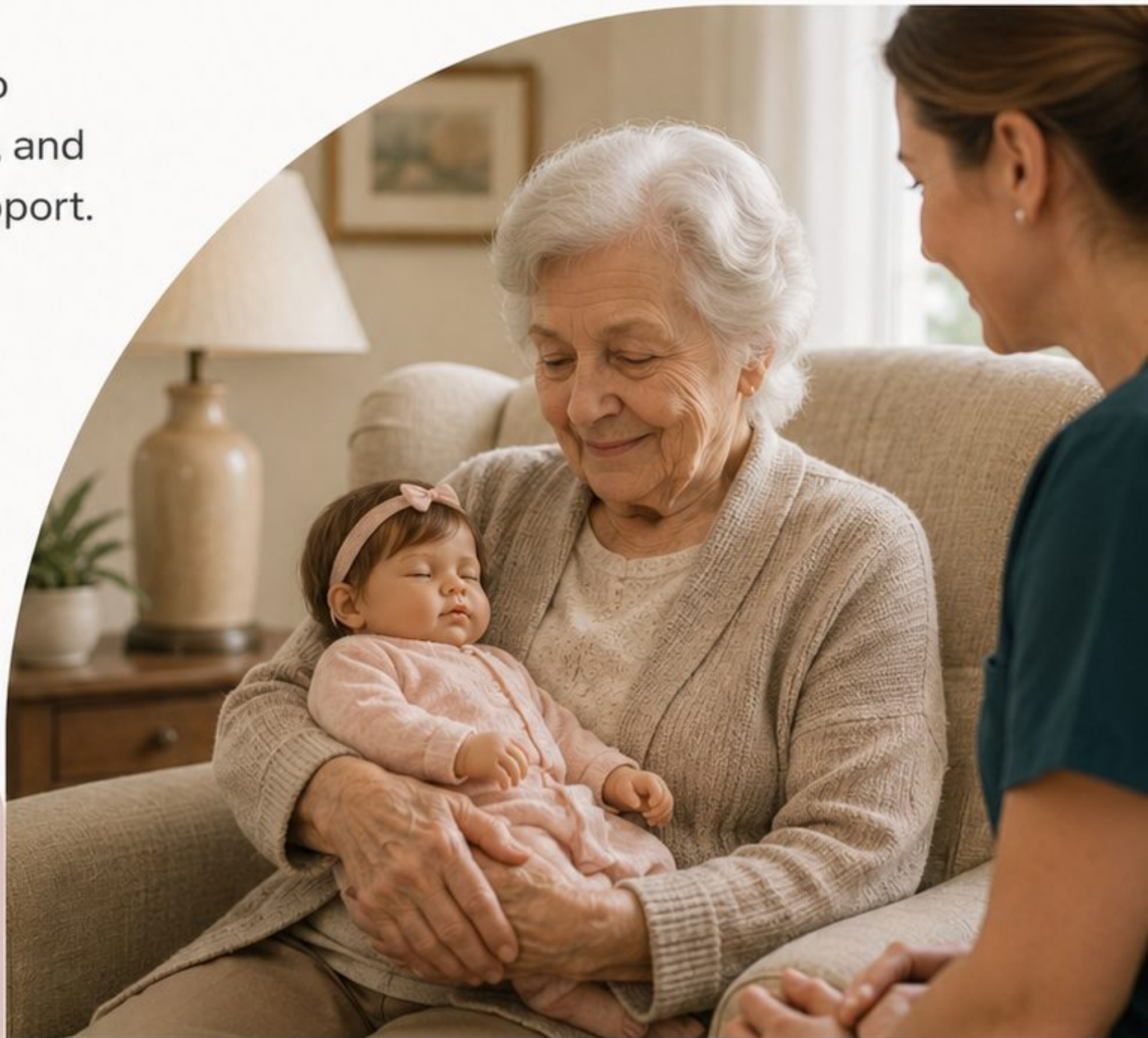


GUIDE

Doll Therapy in Dementia Care

A respectful guide to
comfort, connection, and
person-centered support.



NAVIGATING
SENIOR CARE
with Leah

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*Compassionate Guidance.
Confident Decisions.*

What doll therapy is

A doll can be a source of comfort, familiarity, and gentle engagement for some people living with dementia.



1. A comforting object

- For some people, holding a doll may feel soothing and calming.
- It can offer a sense of security, companionship, or purpose.



2. A person-centered approach

- Doll therapy should be based on the person's history, preferences, and response.
- It is an option, not a requirement, and it should never be forced.



3. What it is not

- It is not about treating an adult like a child.
- It should never be used to shame, manipulate, or distract someone against their will.



Not every person will be interested, and that is okay.

“

The goal is comfort and connection, not compliance.



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Possible benefits to watch for

For the right person, doll therapy may support emotional comfort and meaningful engagement.



1. COMFORT & CALM

- May reduce visible distress, restlessness, or anxiety.
- Can create a soothing focus during difficult moments.



2. CONNECTION & COMMUNICATION

- May spark conversation, storytelling, or nurturing language.
- Can encourage interaction with staff, family, or peers.



3. PURPOSE & IDENTITY

- Some people enjoy caring, rocking, or sitting with a doll.
- It may reconnect them with familiar caregiving roles or memories.



4. EVENING SUPPORT

- Some caregivers find it especially helpful during late-day confusion or sundowning.
- Observe whether it brings comfort or increases stress.



Important reminder

Benefits should be judged by the person's comfort, not by whether the doll keeps them busy.



How to introduce it respectfully

A gentle introduction works best. Let the person's response guide the next step.

1

Offer, do not insist

Place the doll nearby or offer it casually. Avoid pushing it into the person's hands.

2

Watch the first response

Notice body language, facial expression, and interest.

3

Let them lead

If they hold, rock, or talk to the doll, follow their lead rather than directing the interaction.

4

Keep the environment calm

Introduce it during a quiet moment, not in the middle of a power struggle or loud activity.

5

Step back if needed

If the person looks uncomfortable, upset, or uninterested, remove the doll without pressure.

Helpful phrases



“Would you like to hold this for a bit?”



“You can keep her with you if you want.”



“We can set her here for now.”



“It looks like this is comforting for you.”



Protect dignity and choice.

The way doll therapy is used matters just as much as the doll itself.



DO

- Respect the person's interest and personal history.
- Use a calm, matter-of-fact tone.
- Support privacy and comfort.
- Remove the doll gently if care tasks or safety needs come first.
- Notice whether the doll increases connection, calm, or joy.



AVOID

- Do not tease, joke, or talk down to the person.
- Do not force participation.
- Do not use the doll to control behavior.
- Do not argue about whether the doll is real.
- Do not shame someone for enjoying it.



Ethical reminder

Doll therapy should always reflect person-centered care, voluntary participation, and respect for dignity.



When to pause, rethink, or observe more closely

Doll therapy is not the right fit in every moment. Watch for signs that it may need to be adjusted.



1. Possible signs of distress

- The person becomes upset when separated from the doll.
- The doll appears to increase anxiety, conflict, or frustration.
- The person becomes overly distressed if others touch it.



2. Practical concerns

- The doll interferes with eating, toileting, transfers, or needed care.
- The person stops sleeping or becomes more agitated because of it.
- The environment is causing arguments or confusion around the doll.



3. What to do next

- Pause and reassess rather than pushing through.
- Talk with staff or family about patterns you notice.
- Try again later only if it seems likely to be comforting.



Observe and document

- ☐ What happened before?
- ☐ How did the person respond?
- ☐ What happened after?



Doll therapy observation checklist

Use this page to notice patterns, guide conversations, and decide what needs attention next.

1 INTEREST & COMFORT

- ☐ Reached for the doll
- ☐ Held or rocked the doll
- ☐ Looked calmer
- ☐ Smiled or relaxed

2 COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Started talking more
- ☐ Shared memories or stories
- ☐ Spoke to the doll
- ☐ Engaged with staff or family

3 CONCERNS

- ☐ Became upset
- ☐ Did not want to let go
- ☐ Showed more confusion
- ☐ Conflict with others occurred

4 DAILY TIMING

- ☐ Helpful in the morning
- ☐ Helpful in the evening
- ☐ Helpful during restlessness
- ☐ Not helpful today

5 POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

- ☐ Continue and observe
- ☐ Adjust timing
- ☐ Discuss with family
- ☐ Pause and reassess

NOTES



Comfort, dignity, and response should guide the next step.

