♥ Sustained Attention

"Sustained attention refers to a person's ability to work on a particular task or train of thought over an extended period of time" (*www.northeastcenter.com*). Sustained attention is required to complete any cognitively planned or sequenced task. A person who can only concentrate on a task for a brief period exhibits an impairment in sustained attention. Performing everyday tasks such as the following requires sustained attention:

- listening to a lecture
- standing in line
- fishing
- watching a TV program
- reading

Deficits in sustained attention may cause a great deal of frustration. Clients frequently express this frustration by saying things like "I try to watch TV, but I just drift off."

The following exercises provide practice using sustained attention in a variety of tasks. The exercises are arranged in a general order of difficulty from easy to hard.

Long-term Objective: The client will maintain visual attention throughout the length of the task, without verbal cues, to maximize success with activities of daily living.

♠ Sequence

Setup: Take out one suit of cards from a deck. Give this stack of cards to the client.

Procedure: The client fans out the cards in her hand, looking for cards in a predetermined sequence (low to high or high to low). She takes each card out of her hand and places it on the table in the correct sequence from left to right.
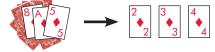
Variation: The client holds the suit of cards faceup in a stack and places the top card faceup on the table. She arranges the cards (from low to high or from high to low) by taking one card at a time from the top of the stack and placing it in the appropriate spot on the table.

♠ Double Down

Setup: Give the client all of the red cards in a stack faceup.

Procedure: First the client goes through the stack of cards, looking for the 2♥ and the 2♦. When she finds one of the cards, she places it on the table. Once the client finds both cards, she follows the same procedure looking for the next cards in sequence until all of the cards are in a single stack in ascending order on the table (2, 2, 3, 3 through A, A).

Variation: Give the client a complete deck of cards. Repeat the above procedure, except this time the client must find four cards of the same value (2, 2, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3 through A, A, A, A).

♦ Stack 'Em Up

Setup: Remove all of the **black** cards from a deck. Give the client the red stack faceup.

Procedure: (task 1) The client goes through the deck, stacking the ♦ cards in ascending sequential order (e.g., 2 through A) on the table and moving all the other cards to the bottom of the deck. The client continues until you say "switch."

(task 2) The client goes through the deck, stacking the ♥ cards in ascending sequential order (e.g., 2 through A) in a separate stack on the table, moving all the other cards to the bottom of the deck. Cue the client to switch between tasks until all of the cards are separated into two stacks.

♦ Even or Odd

Setup: Give the client a deck of cards faceup.

Procedure: (task 1) The client goes through the deck, stacking the even-numbered cards on the table and moving all the other cards to the bottom of the deck. The client continues until you say "switch."

(task 2) The client goes through the deck, adding the odd-numbered cards to the stack on the table and moving all the other cards to the bottom of the deck. Cue the client to switch between tasks until he is holding only face cards and aces.