

Empowering People with Dementia through Reminiscence Therapy

Unlocking Memories

When most people think about dementia, their minds instantly go to memory loss. In reality, we know that dementia can impact people in many different ways, but a decline in cognitive abilities is often accompanied by memory loss, which is why activities such as reminiscence therapy are so beneficial. Let's explore reminiscence therapy and its benefits for those living with dementia.

What is reminiscence therapy?

Reminiscence therapy involves encouraging people with dementia to remember and talk about past experiences – things that were meaningful and purposeful to the person at some point in time. Whether you discuss a certain period in their life or reflect on specific events, this type of therapy can be very beneficial to people living with dementia.

Engaging in reminiscence therapy helps to stimulate cognitive function and also improves a person's emotional wellbeing. For many people living with dementia, long-term memories are easier to recall than recent ones, but there are no set rules with reminiscence therapy. Ultimately, reminiscence therapy should be done in whichever way works best for the person living with dementia on any given day.

Types of reminiscence therapy

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Life story books

Life story books can practically be anything you want them to be. Essentially, they're a collection of photos, memories, captions and other memorabilia that provide links to a person's past. They can be arranged somewhat like a scrapbook, but again, there are no rules. Life story books are a way to capture significant moments or periods of a person's life, serving as a memory aid.

Creating life story books is a fun and engaging way for people to recall memories and discuss them. But many people also like to review their books regularly, whether during a planned reminiscence therapy session or at any time during the day. Not only do life story books improve memory and recall, but they also evoke positive emotions and improve a person's emotional wellbeing.



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Thematic reminiscence

If you want to try a slightly more structured type of therapy, thematic reminiscence can be highly beneficial. This involves focusing on a specific period in a person's life, or even on specific themes such as employment, or sports. By sticking to particular themes, the person living with dementia can organise memories and make connections more easily. More than just a memory aid, thematic reminiscence also lets people share their stories and improve their own sense of identity which can be affected when living with dementia.

Sensory-based activities

Sensory-based activities are another way to evoke positive memories and spark discussions about the past. Often, certain smells, sounds or even objects can take a person back to a certain time in their life. For example, you might play a song from their youth that triggers a memory. Some people recall memories when they bake certain foods because the smell can take them back. So, not only are sensory-based activities comforting and engaging now, but they also help people remember and discuss moments from their past.

Group reminiscence therapy

While many reminiscence therapy sessions occur one-on-one with a support partner, friend or family member, people living with dementia can also engage in this activity in groups. Group reminiscence therapy encourages people to share memories and experiences in an open but comfortable environment. Group sessions have the same benefits as one-on-one, but they can also help people make connections with others and reduce their feelings of isolation.

The benefits of reminiscence therapy

There are so many benefits to reminiscence therapy, whether a person has only recently received a diagnosis or they're receiving permanent care. The other great thing about remembering the past and sharing stories, is that it can be a great experience for you as a loved one or support partner, too. Here are some of the main benefits of reminiscence therapy.

Improved cognitive health: Encouraging a person to recall detailed memories helps to maintain and even improve cognitive function. People with dementia who stimulate their neural pathways with memory exercises regularly can experience an improvement in their recall ability.

Emotional and psychological benefits: Most people take pride in their achievements, so reminiscing is a good way to boost self-esteem. Recalling achievements and fond memories also helps people retain a sense of identity. Feelings of anxiety and depression can be common for people living with dementia, and reminiscence therapy is a way to evoke positive memories and feelings.



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Social interaction and communication: Reminiscence therapy also provides valuable social interaction with friends, family members or dementia support groups. Reflecting on the past in a fun, positive way improves a person's mental health, reduces feelings of isolation and also helps to maintain their communication skills.

Like to know more about reminiscence therapy for people living with dementia?

Group Homes Australia offers specialised services for people living with dementia. From [resources](#) and advice to flexible [respite](#) and permanent care, we tailor our services to suit your needs.

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