Reminiscing Activities for Seniors

Reminiscing is an important activity for everyone. We all cherish our happy memories and enjoy talking about them.

It is a familiar activity; we all reminisce at one time or another - even a young child will sometimes say: 'when I was a baby'. Sometimes busy people like to remember when they had few responsibilities; others love to talk about 'the good old days'.

Reminiscing refers to the casting of one's mind back to times gone by; to being nostalgic about happy experiences in our lifetime.

Reminiscing is a wonderful way for elderly people to feel a sense of purpose, especially those living with dementia. Experts in the field of aging say that as we age, reminiscing takes on a greater significance. There are many advantages to reminiscing with the elderly in residential care facilities.

Benefits of reminiscing:

- Promote sociability
- Improve staff's 'person-centred' awareness
- Impart wisdom through sharing experiences
- Promote self-understanding
- Validation of personal life stories
- Build coping mechanisms
- Meaningful and enjoyable interaction
- Promote communication and creativity
- Opportunity to form new friendships
- Therapeutic for people suffering from depression
- Helpful in times of crisis and mourning

Reminiscing can be Casual or Formal

**Formal:** Videos, movies, slides, diaries, journals, Life Review (structured reminiscing) and pictures.

**Casual:** Questions & Answers, Themes, storytelling, feeling textures, touching objects.

Reminiscing sessions can be conducted one on one, in groups or with family.

Related: [How to Conduct a Reminiscing Session](https://www.goldencarers.com)
One on one session:

A casual visit to a resident is an opportunity to reminisce about a theme of his choice or from a conversation you start. If you are doing a room visit, look around at pictures or objects inside the room to start the conversation. Allow the residents to talk at his pleasure and listen attentively; let them take you where they want to go. Residents may say things to you they don't tell their families. One on one reminiscing promotes communication and strengthens rapport with staff.

Group Session:

One of the best ways to promote social contact in a residential setting is by matching people with similar interests into small groups; 3 to 4 people and holding regular sessions to develop trust and rapport.

The focus of reminiscing can be an event, an era, past lives, themes such as 'spring' or 'Pets' or 'Favourite Toys'.

Family session:

Photos and videos are excellent sources for reminiscing as are cherished objects and handmade items from the past. Feeling textures such as embroidery and patch work can also be very stimulating.

How to develop a successful reminiscing group:

- A room or a verandah where participants are not distracted by noise.
- A table with a group of participants; preferably composed of males and females.
- A theme or a list with prompting questions to start the conversation.
- Ask questions directed to all participants and allow ample time for participants to answer.
- Don't interrupt them; it may be that someone else will add a comment or volunteer a different point of view.
- Be sensitive; don't put participants in a position where they may reveal things they don't want to.
- Be supportive of those who repeat themselves; guide them gently to focus on something else by asking another question.

Tips for group reminiscing:

- Reminiscing sessions should last 45 to 60 minutes (more if they are having fun, less if they lose focus).
- Weekly group meetings with the same participants is one option.
- 'Lend your ears'; listening to someone talk about what is important to them is very beneficial to their self-esteem.
- Use humour whenever you can.
- Bring props and other paraphernalia if the session calls for it. For example: Weddings - veil, wedding gown, bride magazines. Cooking - old utensils, rolling pin, potato peeler, strainer.

**Themes for Reminiscing:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Days Reminiscing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best Recipes</td>
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<td>I Remember my Father</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fishing Trips (for men)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sewing Kits (for ladies)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Depression Era</td>
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<td>Best Holidays</td>
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<td>Summer Reminiscing</td>
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<td>Spring Reminiscing</td>
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<td>Beach Reminiscing</td>
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<td>The Early Days of TV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Favourite Toys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter Reminiscing</td>
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<tr>
<td>The best birthday you ever had</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dancing days</td>
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<td>Your first rock concert (for baby-boomers)</td>
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</tbody>
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Related: [13 More Themes for Reminiscing](#)

**Life Review**

Reminiscing should focus on pleasant memories but sometimes the person may recall unhappy
memories which can upset them.

A 'Life Review' is a structured review of one's life from the earliest memories to the most recent memories.

Life Review is a process by which you can help people overcome issues from the past. The concept was developed by Dr. Barbara Haight, director of a Gerontological nursing program at the Medical University of South Carolina, US.

According to studies conducted by Dr. Haight, most subjects are significantly more satisfied with life after a Life Review session. This was true for both people living at home and those in residential care facilities.

The Life Review process helps people to deal with traumatic events from the past.

Leisure & Lifestyle staff are perfectly capable of conducting Life Review sessions however some training is necessary. If you are interested, approach your manager and enquire about the possibility of education and training in this area.

What reminiscing themes have worked well with your clients?
We would love to hear your feedback.