



How to Conduct a Reminiscing Session

Encouraging seniors to recollect and share memories is a stimulating mental activity. It promotes good social interaction and strengthens friendships. Wonderful and touching stories may be derived from this activity.

Research reveals that group reminiscing enhances the cognitive scope of people suffering from Alzheimer's Disease and Vascular Dementia. (*) The study stated that the general mood and cognition improved in subjects with dementia who participated in some form of reminiscence therapy.

Reminiscing sessions can also help staff to gain a better understanding of their clients' needs, leading to improved care.

Planning a Reminiscing Session

Make a plan and prepare one or two themes / subjects with around half a dozen questions for each to stimulate discussion. If possible find two or three pictures, mementos, or songs relevant to the theme to trigger memories.

Choose questions and mementos that stimulate the five senses; smell, taste, sight, touch and hearing, to help tap into memories.

If at all possible, consider gathering participants into groups of roughly the same skills and cognition.

Tips for conducting a Reminiscing Session

Activity staff should be well acquainted with participants.

- Find out if there is any painful history that is to be avoided such as sad memories for War Veterans, estrangement from family members, recent loss of loved ones.
- Let participants know that they only have to share what they want to. On the other hand if a participant chooses to share a painful story it is alright; sympathize and console as needed (maybe you can have a 1:1 session at a later stage to talk about it).
- Personal issues should be kept at bay until participants are confident and ready to share.
- Often during a reminiscing session someone will shed a few tears; this is quite natural, seniors can get very emotional remembering days gone by. Listen to the person and ask questions steering the conversation to a happier time.

- Use props to give participants a break; something relevant to the theme or subject of the session such as: listening to a song (great to trigger memories), showing a picture or photo, reading a poem or story.
- Respect the confidentiality of residents at all times. (Stories told in confidence are not recorded in Care Plans).

Subjects for Reminiscing

Some wonderful subjects for reminiscing include: *Teachers, The 1960s, Nutrition, Technology, School Days, Winter comforts, Old Time Radio, Bed Time Stories, Road Trips, Summer, Winter, Weddings, Beach Days, Mother's Day and Father's Day.*

For more detailed theme ideas including questions to ask, see this article:

[13 Reminiscing Themes for Seniors](#)

How long should a Reminiscing Activity last?

Sessions should last from 45 minutes to one hour; more or less at your discretion. The length of the session of reminiscing sessions depends on interest and level of cognition. Some participants may suffer from short term memory loss and find it hard to concentrate; they may need encouragement and coaxing to get back on track. Others may welcome the opportunity to talk and share their stories. Introduce breaks to the session to show photos/pictures or serve refreshments.

How to document information from a Reminiscing Activity

Reminiscing stories may be video recorded with the resident's permission or written down as per facility protocol. If this is not possible, chronicle the memories in a scrapbook to share with members of the families.

After the session, evaluate the levels of engagement of participants and the emotions that were surfaced. Observe alertness, enthusiasm, and amount of prompting required. Evaluate also the group as a whole and your own feelings and thoughts about the session and ways to improve upon it next time.

Finally, write your findings in Progress Notes and residents' individual forms.

* (*Geriatrics & Gerontology International magazine – June 2009*)