“There’s always room for a story that can transport people to another place.”

—J.K. Rowling

Not the Same Old Story: Reminiscing and Storytelling with People with Dementia
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Aging Life Care Association
Western Region Chapter Conference
September 21, 2018

What’s the story?

• The importance of stories in everyday life
• How telling and listening to stories may enhance communication skills
• The potential benefits of reminiscence therapy for cognition, mood, and function for clients living with dementia
• Using verbal, visual, and sensory prompts to encourage the expression of personal stories
• The applications of play, storytelling, and laughter

Stories in everyday life

• Tools for teaching and learning
• Transmitting culture and history
• Social connection
• Stories and dreams as “simulators” for real life
Basic elements of story

• Characters: people, animals, or other creatures
• Setting: time, location
• Plot: the series of events that takes place
• Conflict: a problem or struggle
• Resolution: how it ends

... the past, as represented in our minds, is a mental simulation ... Our memories are not precise records of what actually happened. They are reconstructions of what happened, and many of the details – small and large – are unreliable. Memory isn’t an outright fiction; it is merely a fictionalization.

Jonathan Gottschall, The Storytelling Animal

Storytelling for connection

• Active listening and presence
• Validation: “Yes, and”
• Suspending disbelief: paying attention to feelings and meaning, not facts
• Listening with a “beginner’s mind”
Listening with a beginner’s mind

• Listen for the first time, not the hundredth
• Listen as a novice, not an expert
• Prompt for new information, without quizzing:
  - And who else was there?
  - What was the weather like?
  - What did it look like there?
  - What did you think about that?
  - What did you say?
  - How did you feel in that moment?
  - How do you feel about it now?
  - That reminds me of a time ....

Reminiscence Therapy

• Facilitated conversations in which positive memories are shared
• Research indicates positive effects on communication, cognitive status, and depression in persons with mild and moderate Alzheimer’s disease*
• May incorporate the use of images, sensory prompts, or physical representations

*D Source: Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neurology (2015)

Dignity Therapy

Brief, individualized form of psychotherapy originally developed for hospice and palliative care patients.*

Four sessions that focus on:
• Nurturing one’s unique life story (narrative)
• Enhancing meaning in life (existential)
• Generativity (developmental)
• “Seeing the details in others” (journalistic)

Reminiscence and life reflection through stories

Prompts are everywhere:
• Verbal
• Visual
• Multi-sensory: smell, taste, touch, physical movement

Look for opportunities to share:
• Feelings
• Memories
• Stories

Sources, storytelling resources, and further reading


TimeSlips: software, journals, and training in storytelling methods (www.timeslips.org)

GreyMatters: interactive life storybook tablet application (Apple App Store)

Glenner Alzheimer’s Family Centers Town Square: Day program in Chula Vista, CA for people with dementia with interactive simulated urban environment that utilizes Reminiscence Therapy (www.glenner.org)

THANK YOU!

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