

Reminiscence Therapy

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Legendary psychologist Erik Erikson & renowned geriatrician Dr Robert Butler wrote about the natural, healthy, beneficial task of **life review**. Erikson's 8th development stage of life was described as **integrity (wholeness)** vs. despair. Erikson and Butler agreed that counselors could serve as **surrogates & facilitators** in intentionally structured reminiscence/life review approaches for clients' benefit – individually and in groups.

Some of many benefits of Reminiscence Therapy include:

- **Psychological**
 - **positive changes** in **self-esteem** and **affect**; increased life **satisfaction**; **decreased depression**; increased **communication skills, spontaneity**, and laughter.
 - helps to overcome **boredom**; provides **companionship** and **enjoyment**
 - **identifies unfinished business**. “One always has chances to work on issues that were not resolved earlier in life: Nothing is ever cut off.” Joan Erikson
 - **Safe environment** where painful memories may be healed within the context of a sensitive relationship of mutual trust
 - An aid to individuals in dealing with **personal loss, grief and/or depression**. E.g. an individual may not feel comfortable directly expressing anger about the loss of a significant other, but may be able to **express such emotions indirectly** and more comfortably through stories.
 - **Forgiveness** of others and self – telling stories to nonjudgmental, empathic counselor
 - **Making sense of, making meaning, legacy, purpose**. Helps the client integrate her present experience of aging into the context of her whole life - helps her develop a more balanced view of event(-s) and consequences, **question negative** thoughts and attitudes; opens up the **range of interpretations**.
 - **Increases confidence** as a person is reminded that he **overcame past difficulties**. Facilitates a sense of empowerment as clients realize that they are **personal experts on the times** they have lived through. **Enhances self-esteem** through the recall of past achievements. [e.g. weathering the Great Depression, WWII, Pt Chicago fire]
 - **Helps distinguish** the **causes of current emotional reactions** - some of which are related to past events more than present ones [e.g. veterans].
- **Neurological**

“Hemispheric asymmetry reduction in older adults” (HAROLD). High-functioning young people and low-functioning older adults, problem solve using one side of the brain. But, **high functioning older adults use both sides of the brain** to problem solve and thus **do as well as or out-perform younger adults**. Recalling and communicating memories which have been stored in one side of the brain causes memories to be laid down in both hemispheres - an important **exercise for brain health**.

- **Caveat** – “Use the match that improves the symptoms”. Pacing. Follow the client’s lead. Titrating in and out of memories. Go slow. Build trust.
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Reminiscence-prompting Questions

1. Did you ever have to make butter? Or, did you ever read before electric lights? If so, how? (Or, how about telephone party lines?)
2. Where did your family vacation? What happened in those places?
3. What kind of car did you drive during the war? (Or, what was your first car?)
4. What do you remember about your grandparents?
5. What is your favorite kind of tree and why?
6. How did you meet your spouse/life partner? Or, what is your wedding day story?
7. What was the first movie you ever saw? Who were you with?
8. Where were you when FDR died? (Or, JFK?)
9. What did your house look like when you were growing up?
10. What is your favorite song and why?
11. What did you get in trouble for when you were growing up?
12. What was your dog’s (pet’s) name and why?
13. What was your childhood backyard like?
14. What was the first television show you ever saw?
15. Describe your favorite holiday growing up.

16. Who were your heroes?
17. What was it like when your child was born?
18. What do you wish you had known then that you know now?
19. What was your proudest day?
20. What was on the radio?
21. What did people talk about after dinner?
22. What were your childhood chores?
23. Who won the pennant, where were you then?
24. What were some of your childhood games?
25. Describe some of your neighbors growing up.
26. What is your earliest memory?
27. Mother, father, brothers, sisters, other relatives
28. Childhood illness
29. Childhood fears
30. Childhood songs, street games
31. Sundays
32. Toys and treats
33. Turning 21
34. Favorite foods
35. Cars

36.The Great Depression

37.During the war

38.What was your first date like?

39.What was your first job?

40.Describe your best childhood friend

41.What was a major turning point in your life?