

Life Story Activity Kit

Life Story Work

Life Story work has been used throughout the world since the 1970's to help increase people's self-esteem, self-identity and mood. There are many wonderful aspects of creating a Life Story book. The process of reviewing one's life is therapeutic in helping a person to remember old stories and times and potentially attach new, more positive meaning to them. For example, we all endure difficult times in our lives but by looking back on these moments you may be able to identify that they led you to become more independent, resilient, understanding, etc. In addition, reviewing one's life is great for utilizing long-term memory and stimulating the brain. Likewise, the process of creating the book requires one to use communication skills either through writing their story themselves or conversing with another person.

While these are some wonderful benefits for yourself in engaging in Life Story work, there are many benefits for those around you as well. It allows family or friends to get to know you better and spark fun, meaningful discussion together. If you choose to create a Life Story book you can share it with others it could be a wonderful legacy for your family and future generations. As well, allowing professionals, such as nurses, home care workers, and counsellors to read your book, or excerpts from it, could give them more insight into who you are as an individual, aiding in more personalized care.

While the Life Story process is meant to be uplifting, it is possible that you may recall difficult times in your life which could bring up sad emotions. This is ok! Life is neither good nor bad. It is made up of experiences and each of these experiences make us who we are today and are equally important. Do not be afraid to discuss the emotions you are feeling with your family, friends or even your Alzheimer Society Counsellor.

Getting Started

Life Story work can be done formally with someone documenting the stories, either by journaling, scrapbook, utilizing computer programs or video/audio tapes, or can be as informal as a discussion with family and friends.

Sometimes it can be difficult to think about what to share on your own and thus using aids such as pictures or special objects can help elicit stories. It can be very rewarding to sit down and look



through old photo albums. Remember, people with dementia often struggle with short term memory but find long term memory stays intact.

Topics to Consider

If you are feeling unsure how to begin, here are some topics and prompting questions to help engage conversation.

Early Years / Home Life

- What was your home like?
- Did you live in the country or city?
- Did you move often or stay in the same house?
- Who lived with you growing up?
- What were your neighbours like?
- What does home mean to you?
- Who raised you?
- What were your parents like? Grandparents? Siblings? Other important family members?
- What did you like to do for fun?
- What games would you play?
- Did you have any favourite toys?
- Did you/do you have any pets? What kind of pets? What are/were their names? Any funny stories?
- What is your fondest memory from your childhood?
- Did you/do you have any family traditions?
- Did you/do you celebrate any holidays? What is your favourite holiday?
- Where did you go to school?
- Any favourite subjects?
- Any favourite teachers?
- Did you belong to any clubs in school?
- Did you play any sports in school?
- What is your fondest memory from school?

Significant Other(s)

- Have you/do you have a significant other(s)?
- Describe your significant other(s)?
- How did you meet your significant other(s)?
- What was your first memory of them?
- What was your first date? What did you wear? What did they wear?



- Are you married/have you been married? How many times?
 - How was the proposal?
 - When did you get married?
 - Where did you get married?
 - What was your wedding day like?
 - Who was there?
 - Did you have a honeymoon? If so where?
 - What were your first few years of marriage like?
 - How many years have you been married?
- Any advice for new couples?
- What is the most important thing about a relationship?
- What are your fondest memories about being in a relationship?

Children/Grandchildren

- Did you/do you have children/step-children?
- Did you adopt any children?
- What are/were their names?
- When were they born?
- Where were they born?
- What are/were your children like?
- What were the first few days of being a new parent like?
- What did you do with your children for fun when they were young?
- What are some fond memories of your children?
- Any advice for new parents?
- Where are your children now?
- What are your children's lives like now?
- Do you have grandchildren? Great-grandchildren?
- What are their names? Where do they live?
- What's it like for you to have grandchildren/great-grandchildren?

Work/Volunteer Experiences

- Did you/do you work outside of the home?
- What type of work have you done?
- What jobs have you had?
- How did it come to be that you did this work/job?
- How old were you when you had your first job?
- What did you spend your first paycheck on?
- Where was your favourite workplace?



- Did you work far from home?
- What did you like about working?
- What were your colleagues like?
- Did you do any volunteering? Where?
- What interested you in volunteering?
- Did you coach/instruct anything?
- What interested you in coaching/instructing?
- Did you retire? What is retirement like for you?
- What advice do you have for young adults entering the workforce?

Hobbies/Interests

- What do you do in your spare time? Is this different from when you were younger? If so what did you do then?
- Did you/do you read? If so what was your favourite book/genre?
- Did you/do you like music? Any favourite songs/artists/genres?
- Did you have a radio as a child? Who listened to it? When did you listen to it?
- Did you/do you like to dance? Where? When?
- Did you/do you watch Television? What is/was your favourite show?
- Did you have a TV as a child? What did you watch/when?
- Did you/do you like music or the arts?
- Did you/do you belong to any clubs/organizations?
- Did you/do you attend any concerts/theater?
- Did you/do you play any sports?
- Did you/do you attend any sporting events?
- Did you/do you like art/crafting/woodworking/building?
- Did you/do you enjoy gardening/nature/animals?

Friends

- Did you have a best friend growing up? If so, what were they like?
- Who did you spend time with as a young adult?
- Who do you spend time with now?
- Where did you meet your friends?
- What did you do for fun with friends as a child? As a young adult? As an older adult?
- What qualities do you look for in a friend and have they changed over your lifetime?
- What do friends mean to you?

Travel

- Did you do any travelling as a child? Young adult? Now?
- Who went with you?



- What was your favourite vacation spot?
- Did you go camping? Where? What did you stay in?
- Have you ever gone on a plane? Ship? Train? Bus? What was it like?
- What was a funny experience while travelling?
- Did you/do you have a cottage? Where? Who goes?
- Did you/do you have any favourite day trips?
- What was your favourite vacation? Why?

Other Topics to Consider

- Do you have any beliefs/values/religious or spiritual views that are important to you?
- What/who has influenced you in your life?
- Was there an event in your life that impacted you significantly? (ex. war, loss of loved one, etc.)
- Did you emigrate from another country? What was that like?

Other Resources

Here are some wonderful resources to aid you in your Life Story work as well:

- The Alzheimer Society of Canada has created a great downloadable booklet entitled “All About Me” and a companion conversation starter booklet that can be used to prompt reminiscence. Both can be found at http://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/files/national/core-lit-brochures/all-about-me_booklet.pdf and https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/files/national/core-lit-brochures/all_about_me_a_conversation_starter_e.pdf respectively.
- DementiAbility has a wonderful website with many free downloadable resources for persons with dementia and care partners. At <https://www.dementiability.com/free-downloadable-resources> you will find the "All About Me" and "Lets Talk... About Me" booklets which can be used to start Life Story work. “Lets Talk...About Me” is even available in multiple languages (Farsi, French, Mandarin, Punjabi and Spanish).
- DementiAbility also offers a “Let’s Chat” book that costs \$15 and can be used to start discussions at https://www.dementiability.com/Books?product_id=218
- Dementia UK has also done some wonderful Life Story work and offers a free downloadable Life Story Template with instructions and information on Life Story work at <https://www.dementiauk.org/for-professionals/free-resources/life-story-work/>