



L I F E S T O R Y N E T W O R K

LIFE STORY WORK: GIVE IT A TRY!



Looking after someone with dementia or other cognitive problems can be difficult at times and you may run out of ways of talking to each other. Life story work can be enjoyed by carer and cared for together so why not give it a try!

SOME POINTERS TO REMEMBER:



Life story work is not the same as creating a family tree or a historical record



This is about capturing people's life stories so it does not matter if the chronology is not strictly correct



You can create the life story in whatever form suits you and the person best – it does not have to be a written memoir

TOP TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED



Just start with conversations, not interviews or interrogations. Use a prompt such as “I was just thinking of that wonderful holiday we had in... Shall we find the photographs?”



Have a notebook and pen easily to hand to jot down any key points from conversations or actions at any time.



Make a start, give it a try and start small. It doesn't have to be a linear process so you don't have to start from childhood and work up to the present. You can start with something that is triggered as a memory such as a photo from a happy holiday or family wedding. Gather those golden moments or “nuggets” on a regular basis and don't worry about the order at the start.

Life Story scene one.. Action!!

Er John, aren't you taking this a little too seriously?





Rather than focusing on the end product just think about the process of doing the life story both for the person you're caring for and yourself. It can be any format you want such as a book, a memory box, a collage or video



A list of topics can help to provide some structure to gathering information such as where born, school, work and hobbies but it's not essential. Start with what the person you're caring for wants to tell you; be led by them rather than by a list of questions. Remember, it's not an interrogation for a family history, more a chat. It's easy to get caught up in the essential practical daily chores but taking time to "switch off the Hoover" to listen and jot things down can work.



Get their own version of events rather than try to correct them. Does it really matter that it may not be completely accurate? Better that it is something they're happy with.





Aim to include the person you're caring for as much as possible in telling their own story. Sometimes this can be difficult and you may also need to find others to contribute such as relatives, friends or work colleagues. Often younger members of the family such as grandchildren can be helpful as they can be less cautious when asking questions but are genuinely curious and interested. This can be done by phone or using digital means such as Facetime, Skype or Zoom. If they live away or cannot visit easily.



Even if the person you're looking after appears unable to contribute to their own story, do everything you can to keep them involved. Notice their facial expressions to photographs, objects, smells or accounts of their life. If you find out a snippet of information, can you encourage them to tell you more about it? Can they make decisions about which book to choose, what to decorate their memory box with? Can you work out which objects are their favourite, which textures or smells they prefer?



Above all enjoy this activity together.



'The life story book had been sitting on the table for some months, I couldn't bring myself to start it as it would be an acknowledgement that we had reached a significant point with my husband's dementia. However, the lockdown and the inspiration from TIDE about the benefits of life story work got me started on it. It has proved to be a fun and engrossing joint activity and also involves liaison with wider family members. He loves the fact that it is a "bespoke" book and looks "smart". Our advice is: don't delay and make a start on your own'.

Cathy W



If you want to find out more, Life Story Work with people with dementia: Ordinary Lives, Extraordinary People (2016), edited by Polly Kaiser and Ruth Eley and published by Jessica Kingsley, provides lots of information about the evidence base for life story work, the benefits and practical ideas about how to do it.

**Life Story Network have a range of training and support on life story work which can be accessed on our website:
www.tide.uk.net**

**Thank you to Tony Husband for
the wonderful cartoons**



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