

Using Validation and Reminiscence to Support People Living with Dementia

Presented by



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Alzheimer's Texas

A privately funded voluntary health organization formed in 1982 to serve Central Texans with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers.

MISSION

To eliminate Alzheimer's disease and related disorders through the advancement of research and to enhance care and support for individuals, their families, and caregivers.

VISION

To create and sustain a dementia capable Texas in which persons with Alzheimer's and related disorders, and their families, receive quality care, effective treatments, and meaningful support.



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Learning Objectives

- Understand definitions of Validation and Reminiscence approaches
- Learn about the potential benefits and limitations of utilizing these approaches for people living with dementia
- Develop specific validation and reminiscence strategies and techniques to support people living with dementia and their care partners.
- Think about and share ways we can apply and educate others about these strategies



What is Validation Therapy



- ✓ Developed over time, between 1963 and 1980, by Naomi Feil
- ✓ Provides a method for communicating with those living with dementia
- ✓ Focuses on helping the person work through the emotions behind challenging behaviors
- ✓ Challenging behaviors are viewed essentially the person's attempt to communicate emotions, especially in people with memory loss, confusion, disorientation, and other symptoms associated with dementia
- ✓ Invites the person to work through the emotions behind challenging behaviors
- ✓ Helps the person with dementia feel heard, validated, acknowledged, and respected
- ✓ Uses active listening skills, empathy, and reminiscence

Principles of Validation Therapy, as discussed in Naomi Feil's book, "The Validation Breakthrough" - 1993

- All people are unique and must be treated as individuals.
- **All people are valuable, no matter how disoriented they are.**
- **There is a reason behind the behavior of people who are experiencing disorientation.**
- Behavior in older age is not merely a function of anatomic changes in the brain, but reflects a combination of physical, social and psychological changes that take place over the lifespan.
- Older people cannot be forced to change their behaviors. Behaviors can be changed only if the person wants to change them.
- Older people must be accepted nonjudgmentally.
- Particular life tasks are associated with each stage of life. Failure to complete a task at the appropriate stage of life may lead to psychological problems.
- **When more recent memory fails, older adults try to restore balance in their lives by retrieving earlier memories.**
- **Painful feelings that are expressed, acknowledged, and validated by a trusted listener will diminish. Painful feelings that are ignored or suppressed will gain strength.**
- **Empathy builds trust, reduces anxiety, and restores dignity.**

How to Use Validation Techniques

Imagine you are working with your mother, who is living with Alzheimer's Disease and often calls out for her own mother:

- **Center Yourself:** Take a deep breath and slow down. Your initial reaction may be to try to use logic when your own mother starts calling out loudly for her mother. But before you react, think — and breathe.
- **Reminisce:** Ask your mother what her mom was like, and what she misses about her. Share a memory about your grandmother with your mother and allow her to express her loneliness.
- **Use Extremes:** Ask her if she always misses her mother, or what she misses most about her mother. This can allow her to process those feelings of grief related to losing her mother.
- **Match and Express the Emotion:** Join with your mother in her feelings. Acknowledge the sadness of losing her mother and the special relationship they had with each other.
- **Rephrase:** Rephrasing her feelings back to her can provide reassurance that you understand and feel her loss. Saying "You must really miss your mother" can decrease her anxiety because she hears you expressing what she is feeling.
- **Use Senses:** Ask questions about her mother. For example, ask about her favorite food that her mother cooked and how it smelled, or how nice her mother looked dressed up for church on Sunday mornings.

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/using-validation-therapy-for-people-with-dementia-98683>



Validation Strategies: Examples

Example: An adult child is helping a mother who's been diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. The mother is convinced someone is throwing away her most precious belongings, including photo albums and scrapbooks, but the mother is actually hiding these things and forgetting that she has done so.

Strategy: Instead of arguing with their mother, an adult child could rephrase the situation, helping their mother reminisce about her youth in a positive light: "Your wedding ring is gone. You think I've stolen it?," "It was a beautiful ring," "How did you and Dad meet?"

<http://www.alzwell.com/validation.html>

Example: A physician speaking to a woman with Alzheimer's Disease who believes she needs to feed her children.

Strategy: Express the emotional need of the person aloud, thereby affirming the person's right to feel and to express feelings.

- *Patient:* "Doctor, I have to feed my children."
- *Physician:* "You must have been a good mother. You must miss your children."
- *Patient:* "You know it. I always cared for them. Whatever they wanted, I gave them. You guessed it. But I get along all right now without them."

<https://www.alzheimers.net/2013-11-07-validation-method-for-alzheimers>



Benefits and Limitations of Validation Techniques

Benefits	Limitations
Has been found to reduce depression and agitation in some studies	Research is inconclusive about effectiveness
Can reduce the need for medication to address behavioral changes and challenges	Does not work consistently for everyone all the time & less useful in the last stages of dementia when communication can be impaired
Easily applied by caregivers, healthcare professionals, other helping professionals, friends, and almost anyone who learns the strategies (respite groups & adult day care programs)	Can feel less than authentic for some people, based on their communication style, values, and/or beliefs

What is Reminiscence Therapy



Reminiscence therapy (RT) is also known as life review therapy.

Founder and Psychiatrist Robert Butler (1963) published his seminal article on the recollection and evaluation of personal memories in later life

A form of talk therapy often used to treat severe memory loss or dementias

Involves the discussion of past events, activities, and experiences

Usually involves tangible prompts, such as photographs, household items, and familiar items from their past

Offered in both one-on-one or group settings

Can be very structured (life review) or informal



How are Reminiscence Approaches Applied?

- A typical reminiscence therapy session may vary in terms of structure
- Involves asking past oriented questions to trigger memories and promote story telling. **Examples:** Tell me about your parents. Where were they born? What memories do you have of them?
- Can be as simple as talking with a caregiver. The person's spouse or past career could be discussed during a walk.
- Sensory props are often utilized, including tools the person used in their past, photographs, music or film clips from a certain time in the person's life, old fabrics for the person to touch, settings from the person's youth.
- May also be more structured and complex (Formal Life Review)
- Can involve meetings with a therapist or counselor. (For more traumatic or distressing past experiences, a mental health professional should be consulted.)



What is a Life Review?

- More structured, formal form of reminiscence therapy or strategies
- Typically structured around one or more life themes, most often family, childhood, being a parent or aunt/uncle; and work themes, holidays, education, major life events, and retirement.
- More likely than reminiscence to be an evaluative process, in that participants examine how their memories contribute to the meaning of their life, and they may work on coming to terms with more difficult memories
- More likely to be utilized for therapeutic reasons, to address an unresolved life event
- More likely to examine memories in a sequential fashion across the developmental spectrum (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, older adulthood)



Sample Reminiscence Therapy & Life Review Questions

- Do you know the meaning of your family name? Are there stories about the origins of your family name?
- Did you ever have any nicknames as a child or as an adult? Where did they come from?
- How are you like your mother? Unlike her? How are you like your father? Unlike him?
- What was most important to your parents?
- Do you feel you're like any of your grandparents? In what ways?
- How are your children like you? Unlike you?
- What do you think are your three best qualities?
- Which do you think you have the most of: talent, intelligence, education, or persistence? How has it helped you in your life?
- Do you have any special sayings or expressions?
- What's your favorite book and why? What's your favorite movie and why?
- Who are three people in history you admire most and why?
- What have been the three biggest news events during your lifetime and why?

Benefits and Limitations of Reminiscence Strategies

Benefits	Limitations
Has been found to improve cognition, decrease rates of depression, and improve family and caregiver bonds.	Does not work consistently for everyone all the time & less useful in the last stages of dementia when communication can be impaired
Reduce the need for medication to address behavioral changes.	Can prompt someone to relive unpleasant or painful memories
Easily applied by caregivers, healthcare professionals, other helping professionals, friends, and almost anyone who learns the strategies (respite groups & adult day care programs)	Research is still in progress regarding this approach, with some studies showing more impact than others

How Can I learn more about Validation and Reminiscence Strategies?

The Validation Training Institute:

<https://vfvalidation.org/about-us/overview/>

The Legacy Project:

<https://www.legacyproject.org/activities/lifeint.html>

Stanford Medicine Letter Project:

<https://med.stanford.edu/letter/friendsandfamily.html>



Questions?

What do you want us to know?

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