

# Supporting Emotional Wellness In Aged Care

Building connection and strength by reminiscing



## Authors

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While we are all currently experiencing an extraordinary set of circumstances, our older generations may be experiencing increased isolation, distress and anxiety due to COVID-19.

Many of our elderly people have each experienced unique, world changing circumstances across their lifespan and bring their own individual perspectives. Older generations are also a great source of wisdom, strength, resilience and perspective.

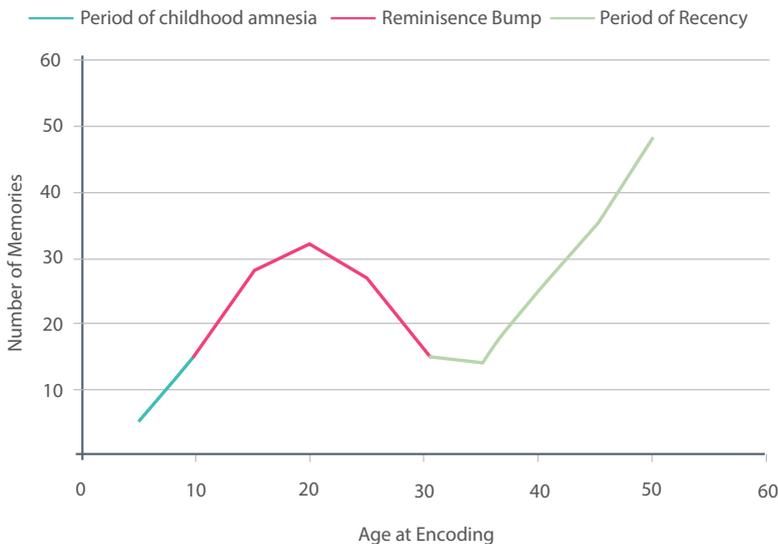
A great way to support and connect in this current time, is to tap into your loved-ones, elders, family and friends' strengths and successes in previous experiences.

## Reminiscence Therapy

*Did you know that we hold more memories between the ages of 15 and 25 than any other time in our lives? Older adults' memories of events that occurred in adolescence and early adulthood are over-represented compared to other lifetime periods.*

- Steiner et al 2014

This higher volume of memories during this life period is known as the 'Reminiscence Bump'.



Reminiscence therapy draws on this period in the Reminiscence Bump timeframe. Developmentally, this is a period that is key to our identity. For many of us this is a time that we are taking more risks, like; learning to drive, meeting first loves, getting our first job, or branching out away from our families into a world full of possibilities.

### Pause for a moment and reflect...

*What world events were happening for you during the ages of 15-25 years?*

Describe what the world was like? What was the song you played over and over again in your bedroom? Did you have a favourite record? Did your tape ever get stuck in the tape recorder? Was there a meal that you recall cooking for the first time? Do you still cook this today? How did you spend time on the weekends? Who did you hang out with and what did you do together? What did you wear? Describe the fashion and trends that influenced your look. What books were powerful to you during this period? Was there a movie that you recall connected you and your peers? What mode of transport did you use to get around? Did you ever get involved in any activism, protests or political movements?

Now, take a moment. What do you notice? How do you feel? You may have revisited memories you might not have accessed for a long time. What is this like? What was meaningful? What has changed now for you? What words of wisdom would you share with your younger self?



## Benefits of reminiscence approaches

- Talking and sharing things that are important allows us to connect, improves our mood and enhances cognitive stimulation.
- Hearing about how past generations coped during significant world events can stimulate problem-solving and reinforce resilience for them, and for us (e.g., during the depression, WW2).
- Solidifies our values. What has been important, or what has been meaningful that we can draw on today?
- It can be fun to share. Sharing enhances connection, engagement and learning.
- An opportunity to revisit past and present roles, and reinforce celebrated achievements.
- Enhance the multisensory stimulation around these memories (smell, sound, sight, touch), just like how tasting a family recipe, handed down generations, helps keeps their history alive.
- Unlocks the older generations self-mastery, strengths and is a sign of respect for the lives they have lived.



# How to enhance time with your loved one through reminiscing:

## Preparation tips

- Ask permission to talk with them about their earlier life experiences.
- Be prepared to listen.
- If your loved one is residing in a Residential Aged Care Facility (RACFs), it's important to plan ahead for these conversations.
- Consider the timing of this conversation. Perhaps consider earlier in the day and be flexible.

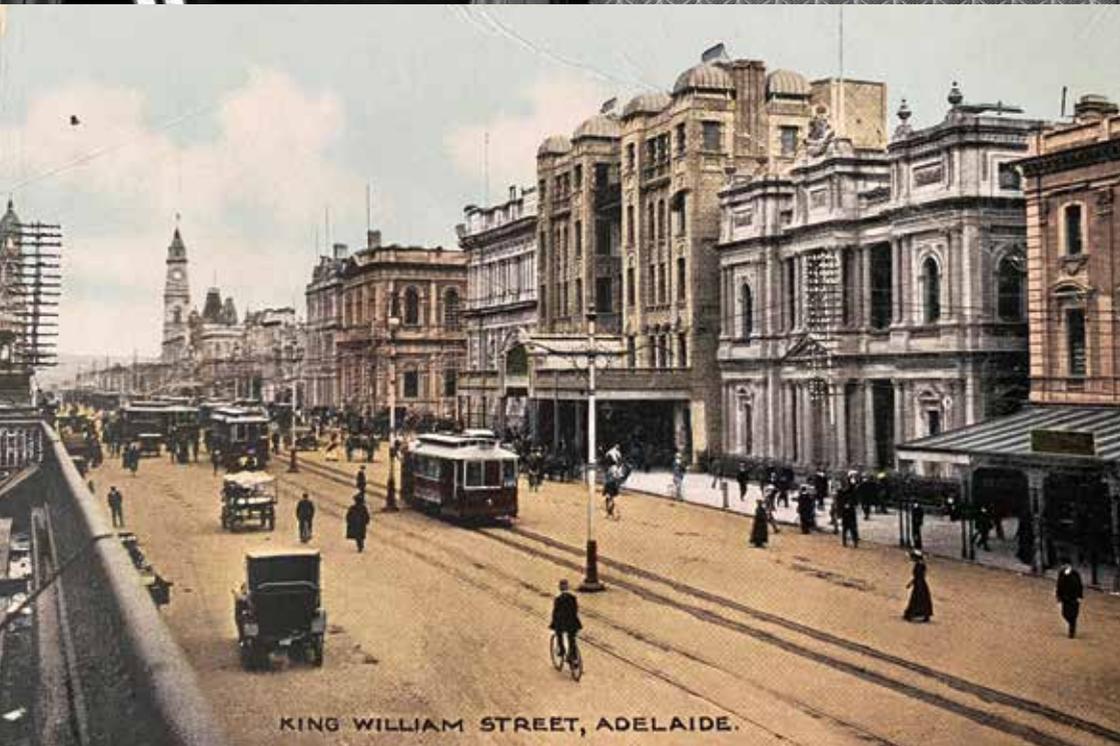
## Some fun things you might try

- Print an old photo and make it into a post card to send to them.
- Search for some music from this important time in their life to play in background.
- Dig out family recipe books. Try cooking something and share this experience with them when you next chat. You could also give them a call while you are cooking to ask for tips.
- Visit online libraries and view some photos from their era, this can support conversations. For example, do you know what Victoria Square, Adelaide looked like in the 1940s?
- If your family prays or meditate, schedule a time for your loved one to do so at the same time.
- Make your own black and white movie and send it to your loved one.

## Four questions to help identify some helpful reminiscence topics

- What memories does the person like talking about?
- What roles have been important during their life?
- What life events have they lived through?
- What interests is the person passionate, and enjoys talking about?





## Questions to help your loved one get reminiscing – Beginnings & branching out

### The early years

- What is your earliest memory of childhood?
- Were you from big or small family? What was the fondest memory of your family?
- Where did you grow up? What was it like?
- What were other kids like in your neighbourhood?
- What was your favourite lolly?
- Did you have a nickname, and how did you get it?
- Did you have a pet? What was their name?
- What was your best friends name?
- Did you attend any religious/spiritual activities such as church, temple, Mosques or a Monastery with your parents?
- Did you wear a uniform to school? Did you have a favourite teacher? Why were they your favourite?
- Did you learn another language? Do you still speak it now?

### Adolescence: Branching out

- How old were you when you first learnt to drive?
- What type of music did you listen to on the radio? What was your favourite record?
- What was your favourite home-cooked meal?
- How old were you when you went to your first dance?
- Did you play sport? Who for? What position?
- How old were you when you started working?
- Did you take any risks when you were a teenager? What did you learn from this experience?
- What was your first school trip? Where did you go?
- Was there a book that influenced your life?
- What was the first holiday without your parents? Where did you go?



## Questions to help your loved one get reminiscing - Early adult life

### Early adult life: The emerging individual

- When did you first fall in love? Do you believe in love at first sight?
- How did you meet 'the one'-the person that became your wife, husband, partner? How did you know they were the one?
- How old were you when you became a parent? How did this shape your life?
- What advice do you have for young couples?
- What were the most difficult times? What were the best times?
- What were you good at when you were younger?
- What are some of the beliefs or values you have chosen as an adult that are unique and different from your family?
- During wartimes where were you located? What was that like? Who were you with? What helped you stay connected to your loved ones during this time?
- What are some of the most important events that have occurred in your life?

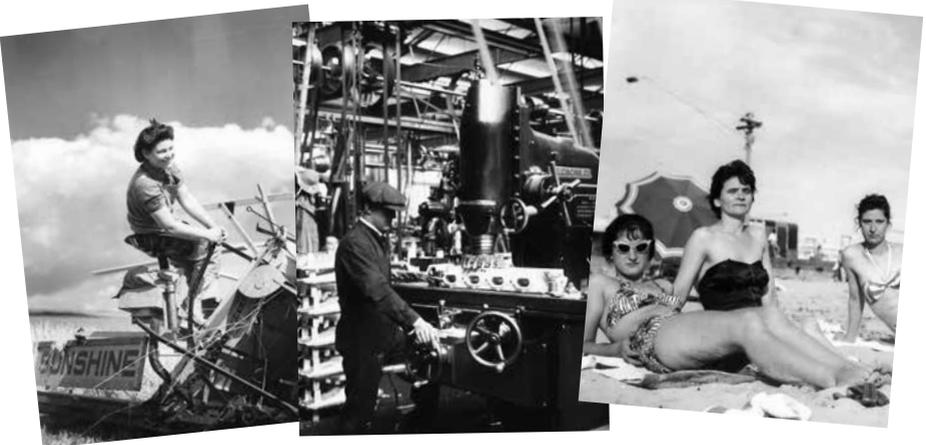




## Questions to help your loved one get reminiscing - Imparting wisdom

### Words of wisdom: Strength and resilience

- Reflecting on what you have done in life, what are your strengths?
- What aspects of your cultural beliefs have been a source of strength across your life?
- Has your religion or spirituality been important to you in your life? How has this been a source of strength for you during challenging times?
- Who has been the kindest to you in your life? What did they do?
- Are there any funny stories your family tell about you that come to mind?
- Do you remember a time you managed to solve a problem? What did you do and what did you learn about yourself as a result?
- Are there any funny stories, or memories, or characters that you would like to share?
- For your great grandchildren, is there any wisdom you'd want to pass on to them? What would you want them to know?
- If we were to make a film of your life what would be important to include?





## About Supporting Emotional Wellness in Aged Care

The Relationships Australia South Australia's Supporting Emotional Wellness in Aged Care service provides free counselling and or groups for people living in residential aged care facilities (RACFs). This service enables residents of registered RACFs to access free mental health services available to those in the community.

Several types of support may be helpful and are offered by trained health professionals. Talking about feelings can be enormously beneficial such as feelings of loss and grief, anger, anxiety and depression.

Emotional wellness is important part of our general health. The Supporting Emotional Wellness service is here to support residents of aged care facilities.

### Contact us

Phone: (08) 8419 2000

Website: [www.rasa.org.au/sew](http://www.rasa.org.au/sew)



Reference: Steiner, K. L., Pillemer, D. B., Thomsen, D. K., & Minigan, A. P. (2014). The reminiscence bump in older adults' life story transitions. *Memory*, 22(8), 1002-1009.



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