

Life History - *Factsheet*

Dementia web 
Information resource for carers, professionals and you

www.dementiaweb.org.uk



Life History

What is a life history?

- A person's past is a vital part of their dementia experience. Knowing about a person's history helps you to support the person with dementia today.
- A life history is more than just a series of life events. It includes:
 - Beliefs / values / religion / faith.
 - Likes / dislikes.
 - Important events, accomplishments and disappointments.
 - People – spouse, partner, friends, family, colleagues - and pets.
 - Favourite or significant places, important objects and possessions.
 - Talents/skills/capabilities.
 - Hobbies and interests.
 - Education and work life.
 - Habits.
 - How a person reacts to situations.

How does life history help?

- Knowing someone's life history can reveal a person's past routines which can be used now in their day to day care.
- Having information can help to explain a person's current behaviour and actions.
- Families, friends and other carers may have a better chance of understanding what a person may be trying to communicate. Life history may also reveal a person's private language and words.
- Sharing a life history can give a person the chance to talk about their past and feel involved.
- Knowing a life history can give clues to a person's strengths, what they are still capable of doing for themselves.



How do I find out about life history?

- Start with the person you are caring for - if their memory allows. Recent history is as valuable as past history but the person with dementia will probably have better recall of older memories.

Life History

- Collect the information in stages. A person with dementia may not be able to concentrate on one subject for very long.
- Use prompts such as a particular era – when the person was at school, their first job/child. Find out what was happening in the country or locality at that time to give shape to the recollections – this is especially helpful if the person has great difficulty trying to locate old memories.
- Using props from a bygone age to prompt reminiscence can be useful for gathering information and stimulating old memories.

How do I use life history?

- You can use the person's experiences and their 'well known' or esoteric words in your conversations with them.
- Sometimes you can adjust how you care for the person to incorporate their old habits and routines.
- You could give a person the chance to talk about their past in a positive way, share their memories and make conversation more meaningful.
- The person may have a collection of old photographs that you could identify and label. This will allow you and others opportunities to chat about who is in a photo, where a photo was taken, holidays, places, pets etc.
- Sharing life history with younger family members or carers can give them a different perspective on the person they see before them now.
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Dementia Information Service for Carers

Helpline Number **0845 4379901**

Call in normal office hours. Answer phone at other times.

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