

# Storytelling and Reminiscence in Aged Care

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# Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which Swinburne's Australian campuses are located in Melbourne's east and outer-east, and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

We are honoured to recognise our connection to Wurundjeri Country, history, culture, and spirituality through these locations, and strive to ensure that we operate in a manner that respects and honours the Elders and Ancestors of these lands.

We also respectfully acknowledge Swinburne's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, alumni, partners and visitors.

We also acknowledge and respect the Traditional Owners of lands across Australia, their Elders, Ancestors, cultures, and heritage, and recognise the continuing sovereignties of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

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# Two decades of research and practice

There are more older adults than ever before.  
By 2050, 25% of Australians will be classified as older

What does it mean to have quality of life as we age?

What makes people happier in late life?

What can we do as mental health practitioners and researchers to help improve emotional wellbeing in older adults?



# Swinburne Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults

## Established in 2011

- The Swinburne Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults was established to address mental health needs of aged care residents, their families and residential care staff.
- The clinic has provided thousands of hours of counselling sessions, group programs, befriending and digital story sessions, education and training sessions
- Telehealth counselling nationally, in person counselling, intergenerational programs, digital story and befriending programs, family support groups, life writing groups, reminiscence groups, men's groups, placements, webinars, workshops, research and evaluation projects

# Evidence based psychological treatments for late life depression

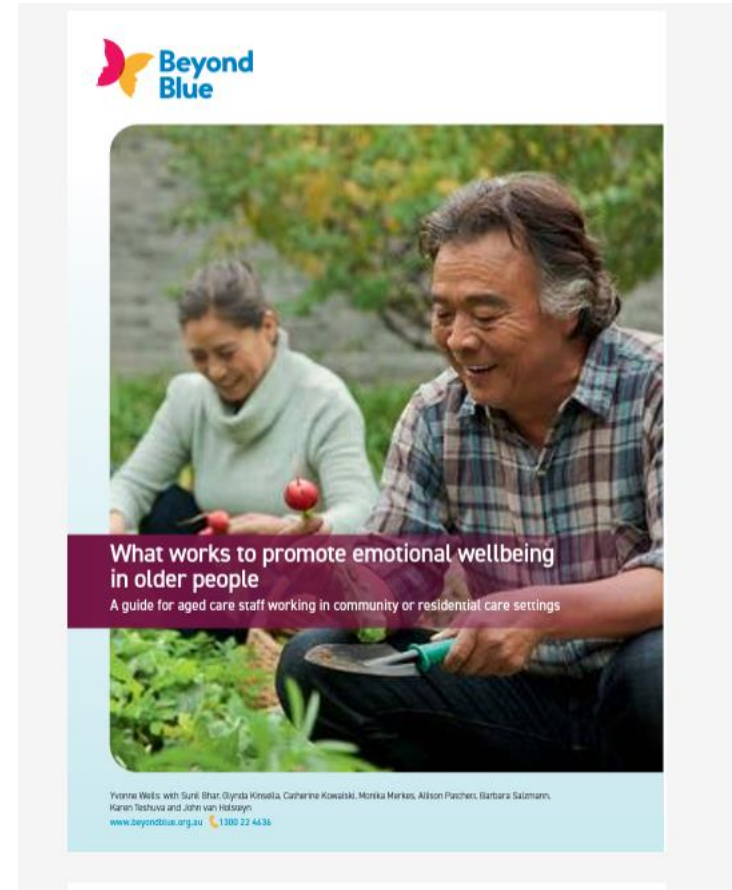
Supportive counselling

Behavioral activation

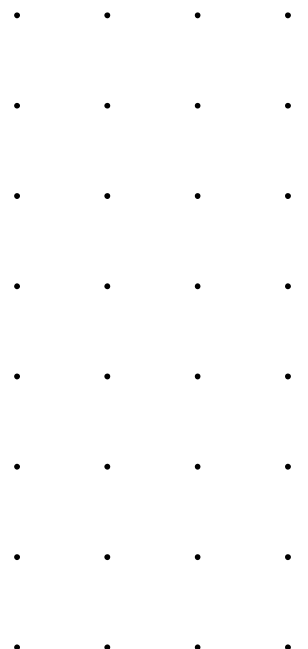
Problem solving therapy

Cognitive behavioural therapy

Reminiscence therapy



[https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/329885\\_0616\\_bl1263\\_small\\_v5.pdf](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/resources/329885_0616_bl1263_small_v5.pdf)





We can't imagine a life without stories



# We are in love with stories





Stories entertain us



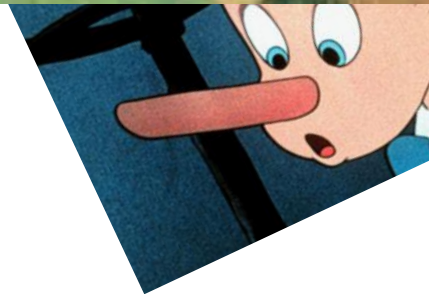


Stories transport us





# Stories teach us



# Stories connect us



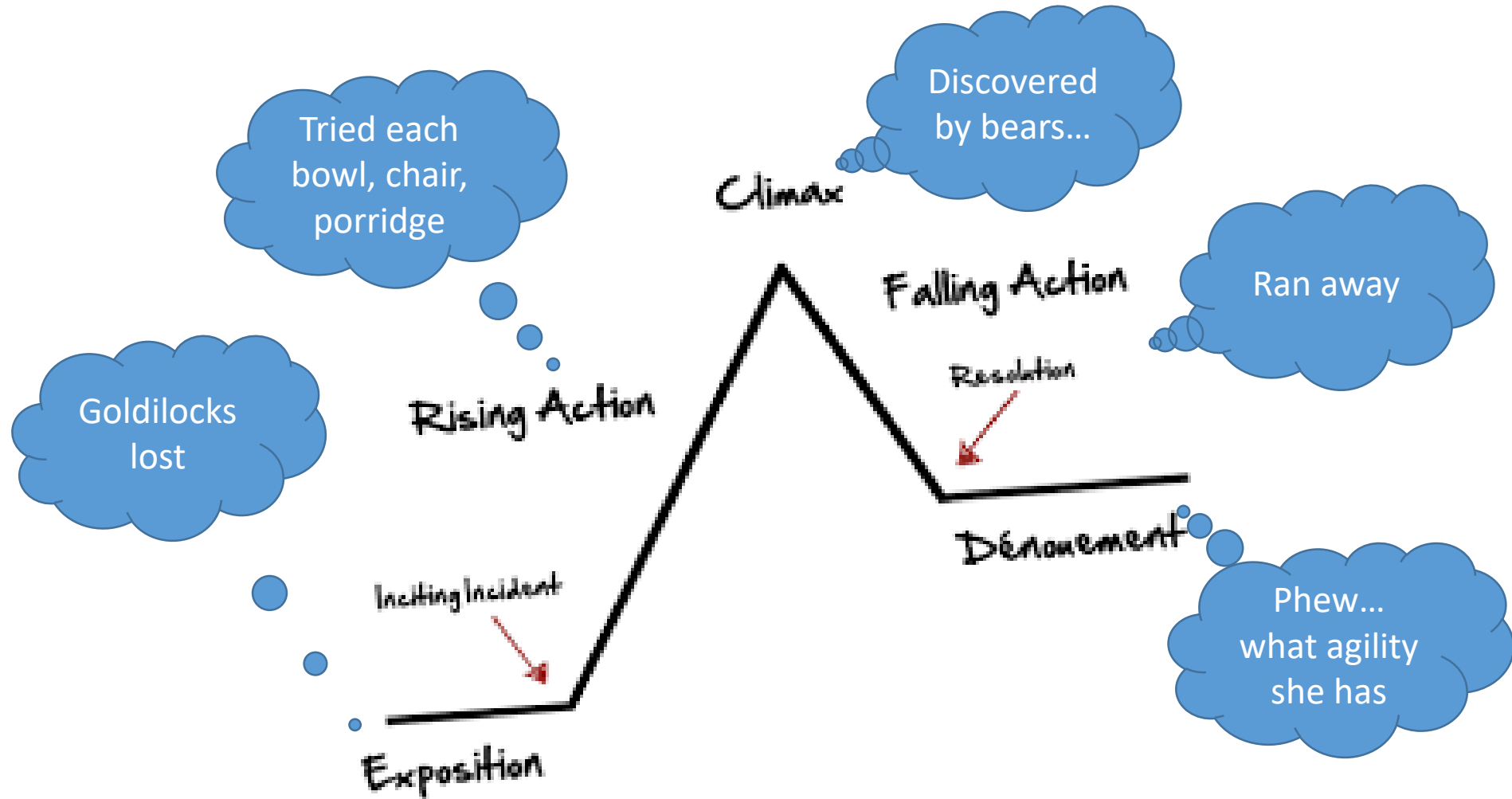
Can they transform us?



Not simply a  
recounting of  
events



A start, middle, end



# Healing stories

- Redemption – values emphasised; “From that death, I learnt that I should not take life for granted”
- Communion – relationships strengthened; “My illness made me a better listener”
- Agency – autonomy prized – “I am a fighter”

# Discussion with a patient

T: Do you think your training in the military and your way of working...have prepared you for the future?

P: My training started back home with my mum... She was strict...she had me get up and go to school everyday. We were poor, not that we didn't have food to eat or clothes to wear, but we had to wash our underwear, socks, put them on the heater so that they could dry for school the next day...I had to put paper in the bottom of my shoes because we had holes in them. We learnt to appreciate a lot of things. If I made \$10, I gave up \$9 for the house...

T: So, you developed a work ethic...had structure in your day, you didn't take things for granted because things were a struggle for you. You learnt to be responsible at that very early age.

P: Yeah...

T: So how have all these helped you in your adult life?

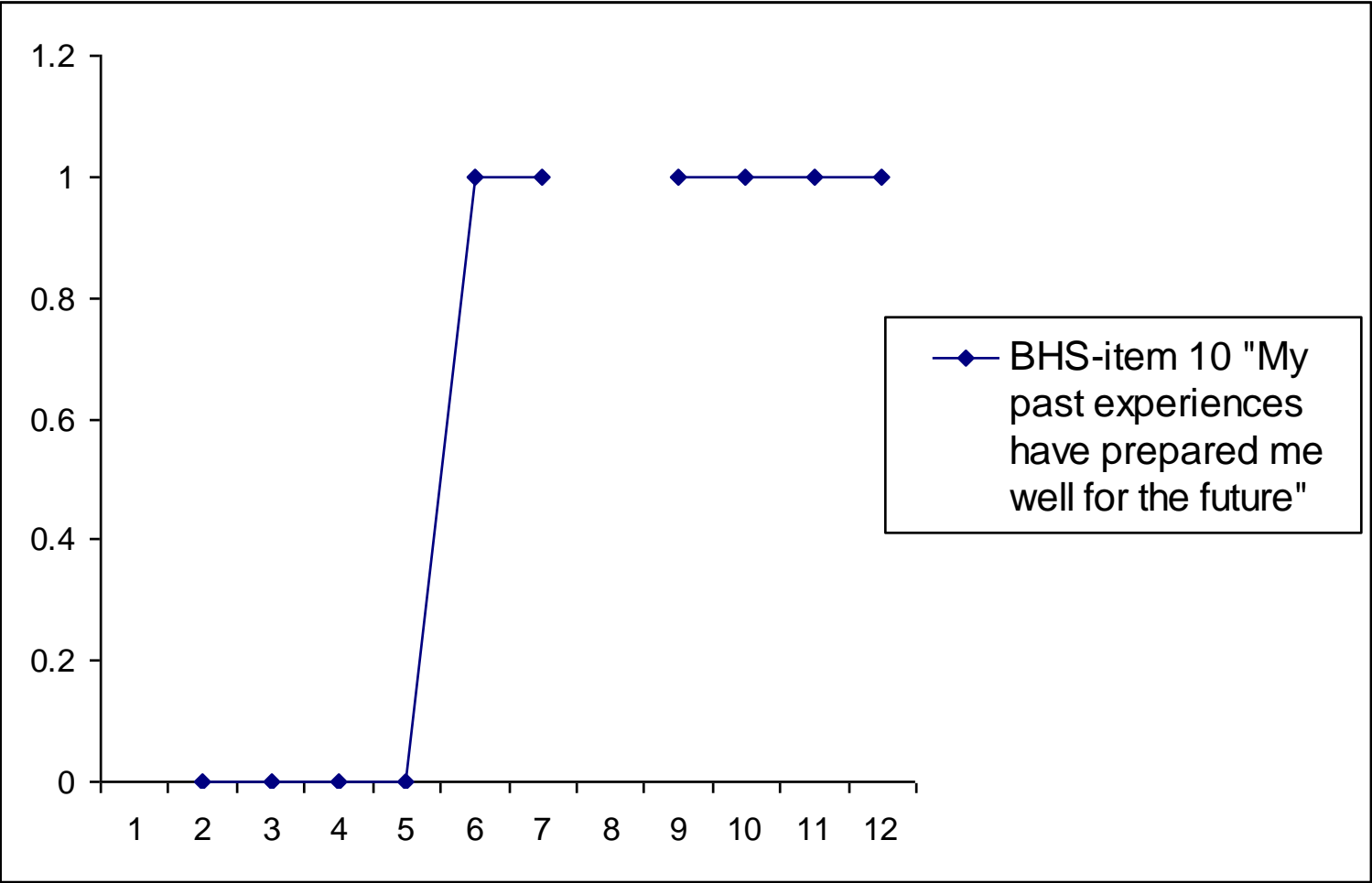
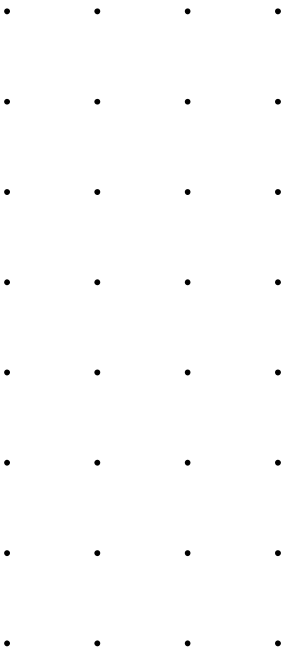
P: I do my best at my jobs...I've never been fired off a job.

T: Over the course of your life...you have developed certain skills, certain ways of thinking...do you think they have helped you through the course of your life?

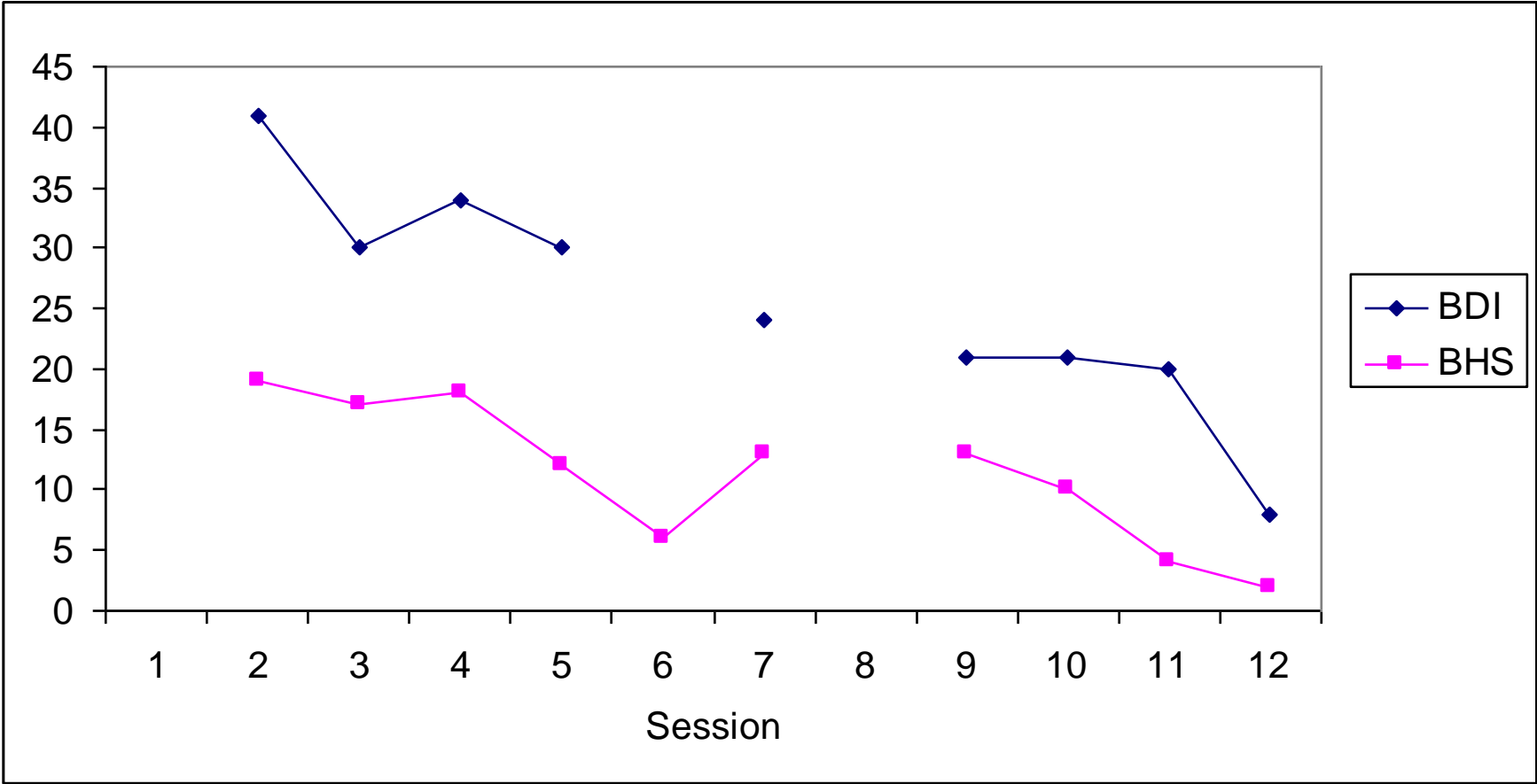
P: Oh yeah



# Discussion with a patient

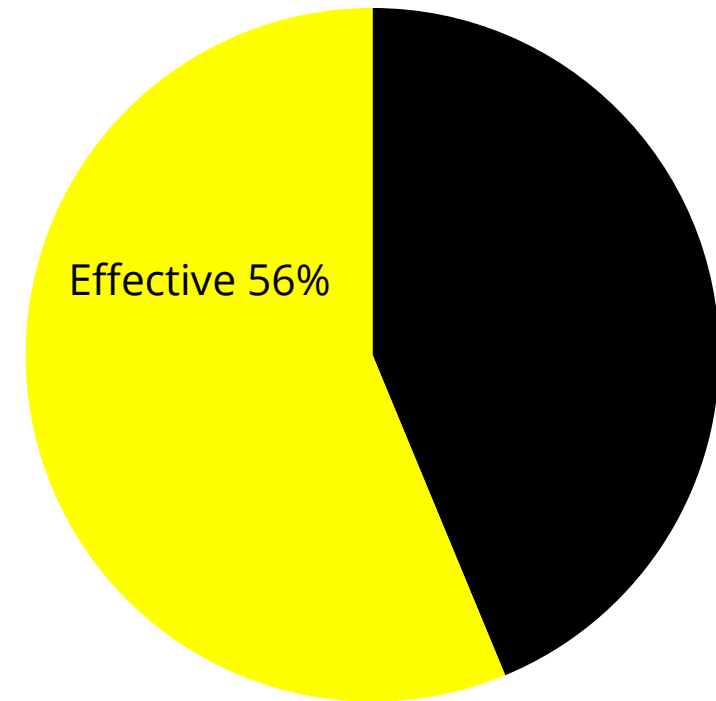


# Discussion with a patient



# Purported benefits of reminiscence

Research evidence about the extent to which reminiscence improves mental health is mixed due to limitations of studies. Some studies have found no effects, while others have found positive effects: reminiscence is associated with increased cognitive functions and quality of life and decreased depression and neuropsychiatric symptoms. Some have found negative effects.



\*29 studies, 7% negative effects

Woods B, O'Philbin L, Farrell EM, Spector AE, Orrell M. Reminiscence therapy for dementia. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2018, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD001120. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD001120.pub3. Accessed 09 June 2023. Saragih, I. D., Tonapa, S. I., Yao, C. T., Saragih, I. S., & Lee, B. O. (2022). Effects of reminiscence therapy in people with dementia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of psychiatric and mental health nursing*, 29(6), 883–903. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpm.12830>

# Taxonomy of reminiscence

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My husband died when I was away for two days visiting my friends in the West. He fell in the bathtub and eventually died. I still cannot forgive myself for leaving him home alone for two days

Lamenting

During the Great Depression, life was very hard. There were very few jobs, and money was difficult to come by. But we learned to survive by budgeting and making do without many things. The lessons I learned in those years have really helped me in trying to live on my old-age pension

Problem solving



# Mechanisms of change

Improves connectedness with other people

Enjoyable and distracting

Psychological bridge to past resources

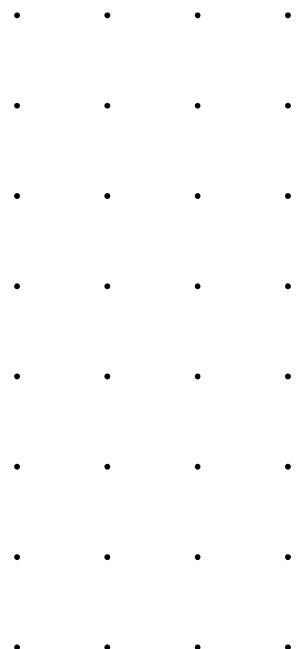
Primes feelings of mastery and self-efficacy

Expands understanding of the past

Affirms identity

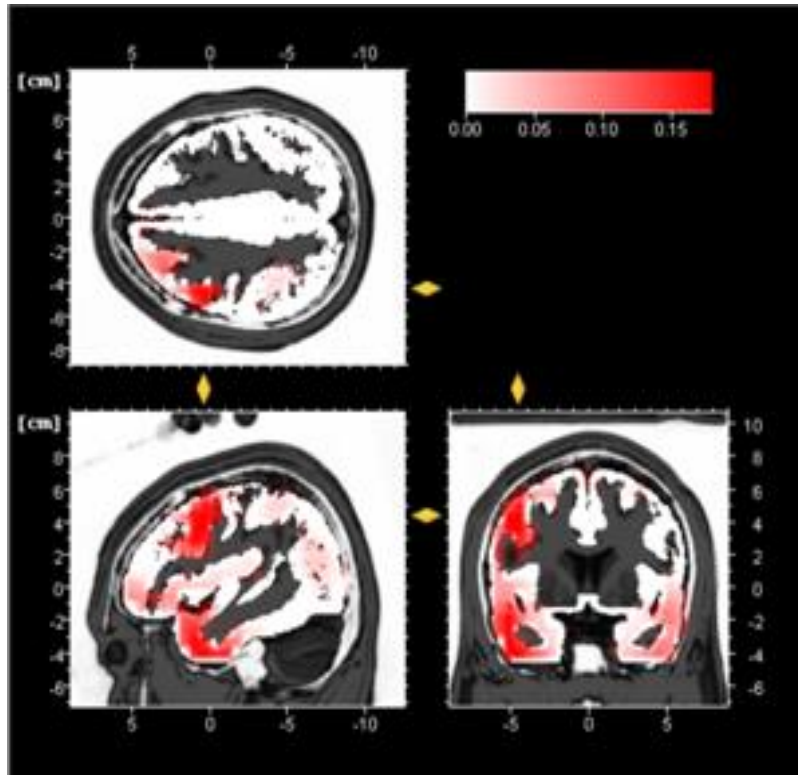
Involves memory centres that preserved

Helps carers deliver personalised care



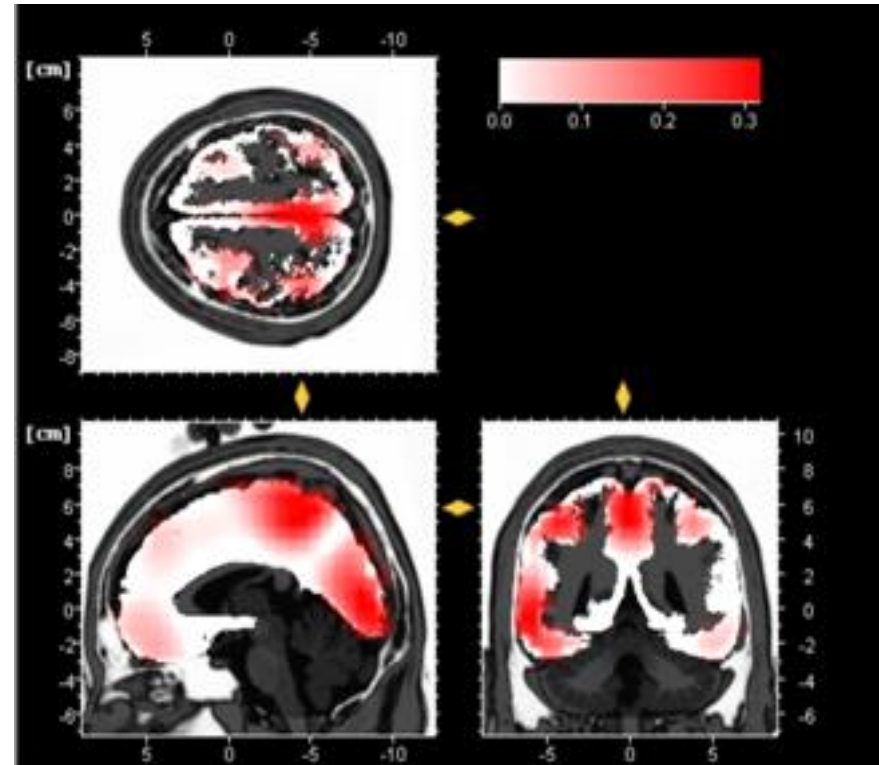
# LIFE REVIEW THERAPY ACTIVATES SOMATOSENSORY AND VISUAL REGIONS

**Control**



**Memory systems  
activated**

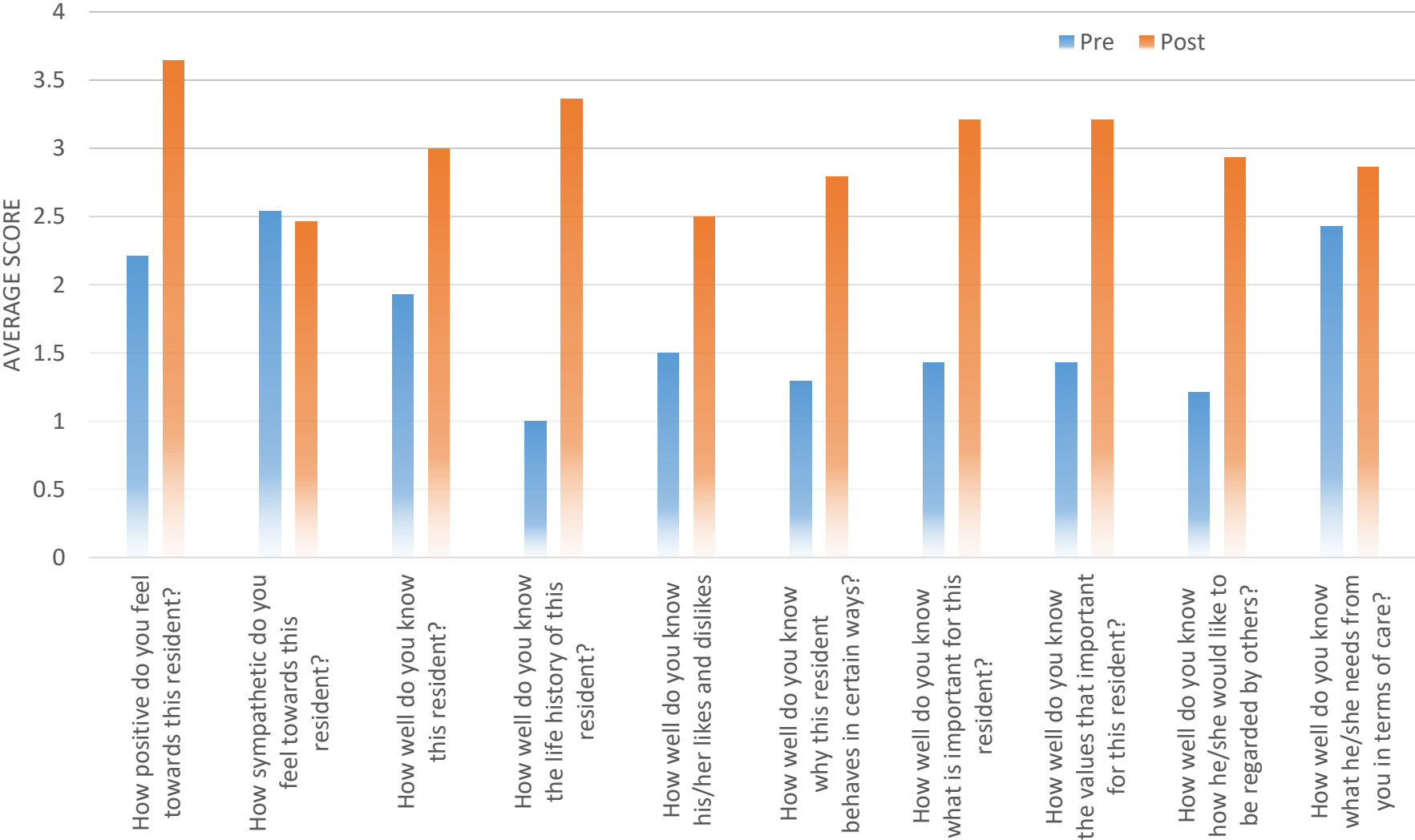
**Reminiscence**



**Somatosensory and Visual  
processing systems activated**

Bhar et al, under  
review

# Mechanisms of change



Bhar, S., Stargatt, J., Collins, R., Bhowmik, J., & Silver, M. (2022). Preliminary evidence for the impact of digital life stories about aged care residents on staff knowledge and understanding regarding those residents; A single arm trial. *Journal of clinical nursing*, 31(15-16), 2252–2258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.16043>

# Reminiscence and storytelling approaches

- Simple reminiscence – to encourage social connections and shared memories
- Life review therapy – to encourage a recollection of problem solving successes
- Life review – to encourage an understanding of one's life and identity



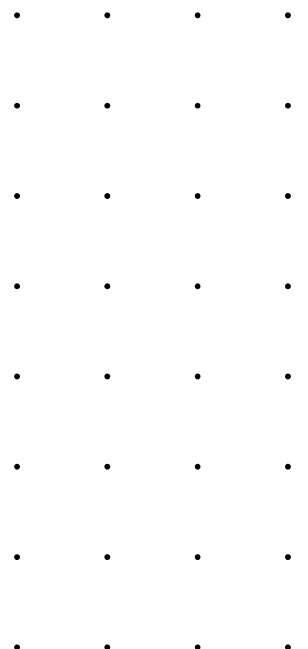
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# Simple reminiscence

The aim of this type of reminiscence is to engage the client in pleasurable discussion and to create or strengthen engagement between the resident and you.

Usually, this type of reminiscence is bi-directional – that is, you share your experiences or common memories (e.g., “my grandmother used to say that too...”). Talk about growing up, schooling, their marriage, neighbourhood, favourite movies and so on.



# Simple reminiscence

What is the story of your name

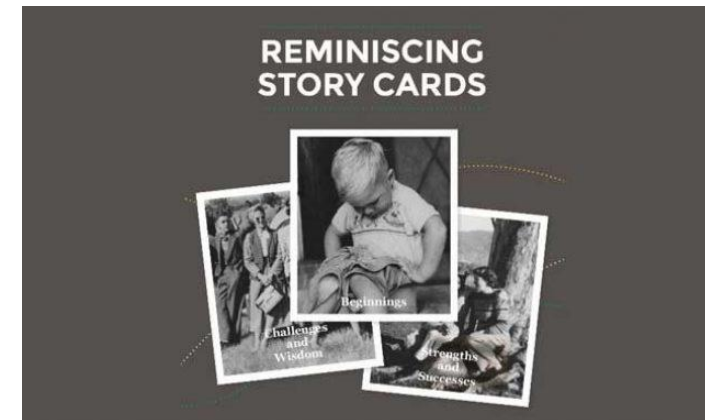
Where does your family come from?

When did you move to this city?

What was schooling like in your childhood?

How did you meet your wife?

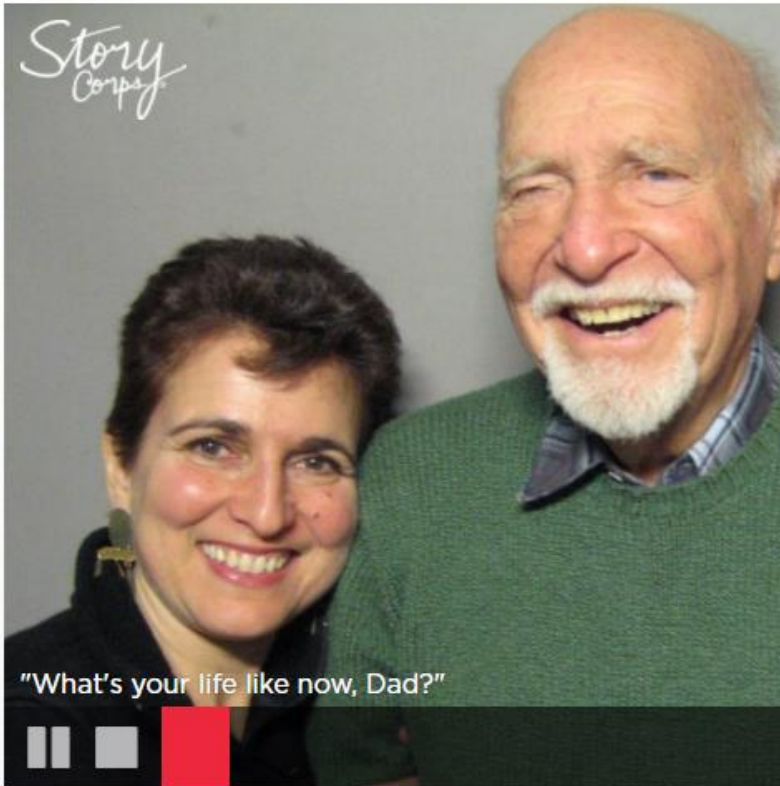
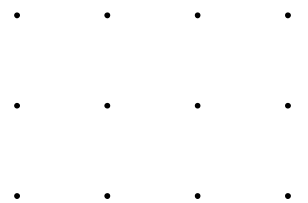
What work did you do?



[Cota.org.au](http://Cota.org.au)



# Simple reminiscence



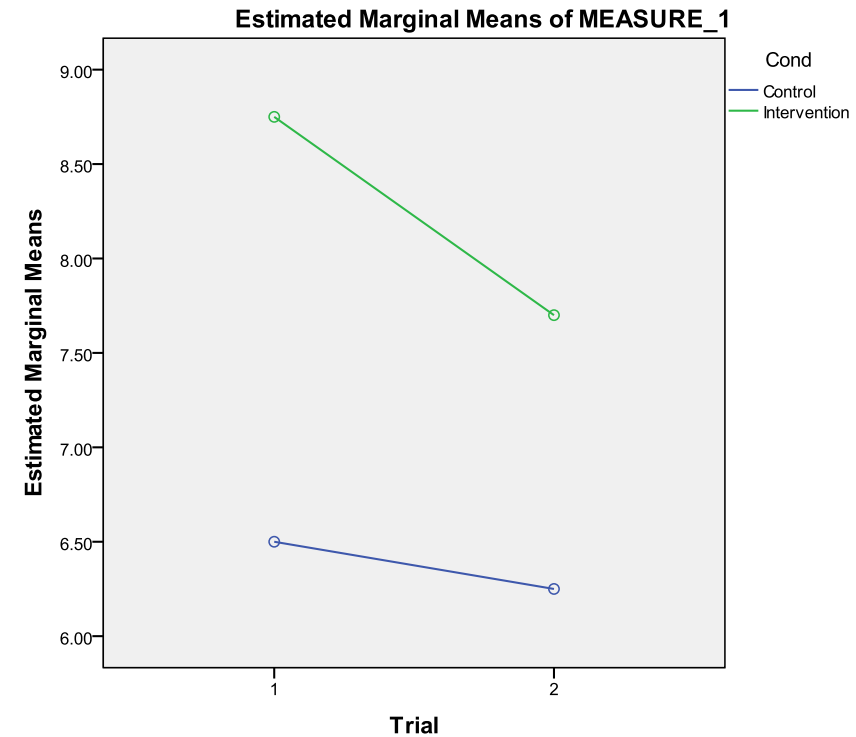
<https://storycorps.org/stories/ken-morganstern-priya-morganstern-and-bhavani-jaroff/>



<https://vimeopro.com/user19105161/swc/video/209147370>

# Life review therapy

In this form of reminiscence, you ask specific questions designed to prime a positive representation of self, where the resident can feel efficacious by recalling problem solving successes. These questions prompt for stories of success, and experiences of mastery.

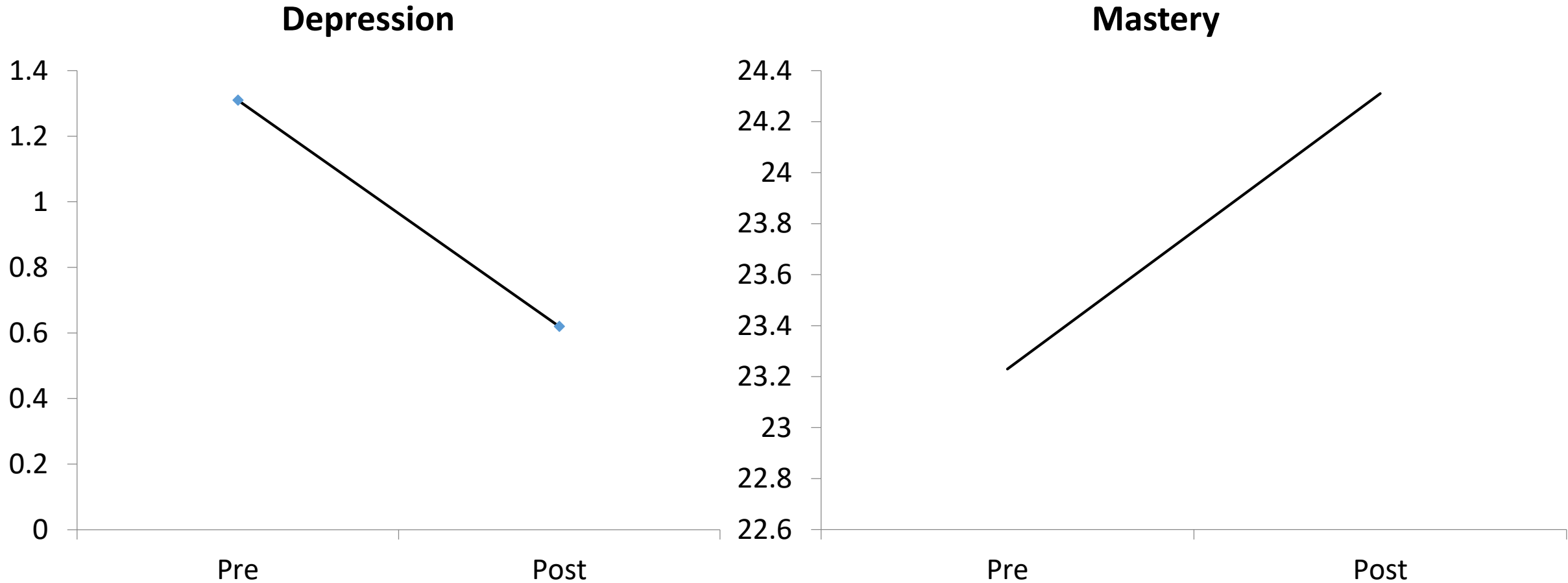


# Life review therapy

Think back over your life and try to remember times when you managed to solve a problem, which required some effort or creativity on your part. Can you describe the problem you faced? How did you solve the problem - What did you do? How did you think of the solution? What qualities did you show, which helped solve that problem?



# LIFE REVIEW THERAPY IMPROVES MOOD AND FEELINGS OF MASTERY

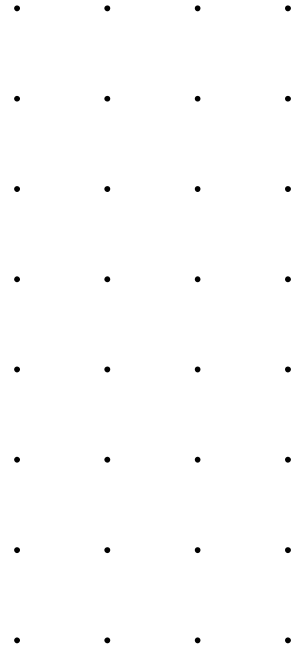


An open trial of the intervention with 26 non-clinical participants. Participants' mean age was 34 ( $SD=11.30$ ; range = 18 – 58). Participants were engaged through a one-to-one interview to talk about their past problem solving successes. James, K. L., & Bhar, S. (2016). Brief reminiscence intervention improves affect and pessimism in non-clinical individuals: A pilot study. *Clinical Psychologist*, 20, 119-124

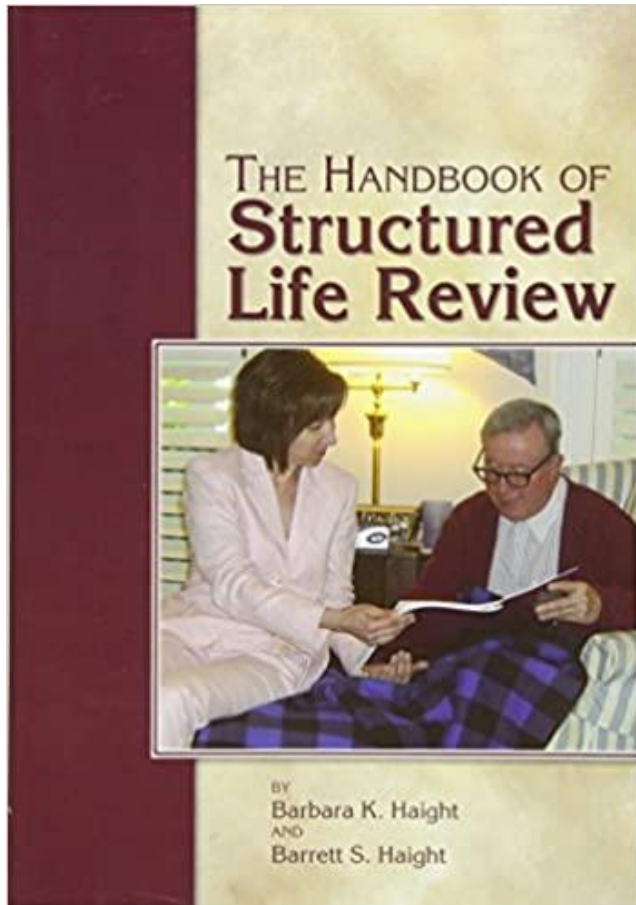


# Life review

Life review is a more integrative form of reminiscence intervention. The purpose of this intervention is to assist the resident to appreciate the common themes throughout their life (i.e., the “thematic unity of one’s life”), and to reach a sense of who they are (a sense of self, called “narrative identity”). Usually, the outcome of such reminiscence is a life-book or digital story.



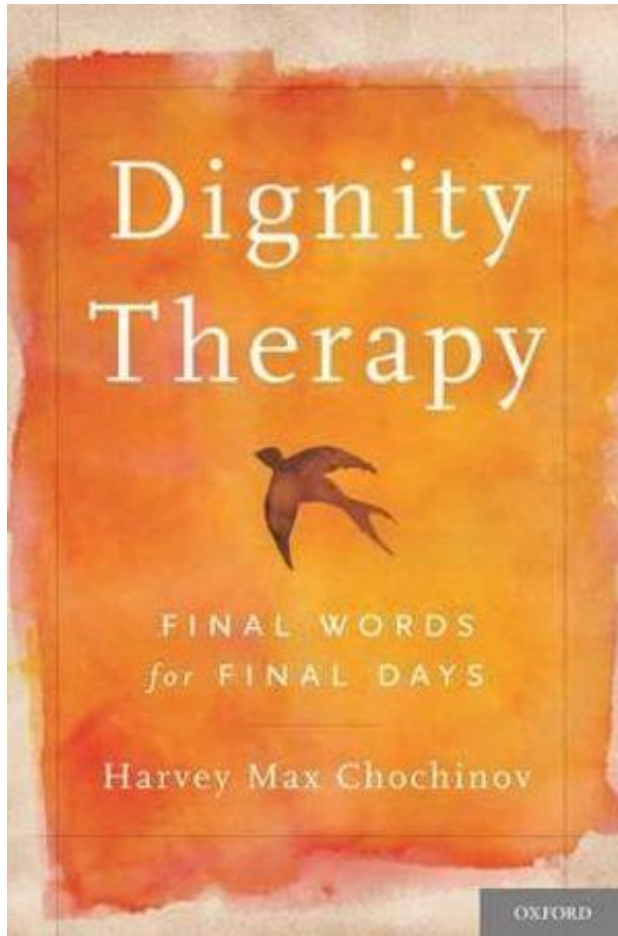
# LIFE REVIEW



#	Life stage	Questions
1	Early childhood	What was life like as a child? What were your parents like? Did you feel care for as a child?
2	Family and home	What was the atmosphere like in your home? Tell me about your extended family
3	Young adulthood	What as like for you in your 20s and 30s; what kind of person were you?
4	Older adulthood	What wisdom would you like to hand down to the next generation? On the whole, what kind of life had you had?

Haight, B. K., & Haight, B. S. (2007). *The handbook of structured life review*. Baltimore: Health Professions Press

# LIFE REVIEW FOR END OF LIFE CARE



Chochinov, H. M. (2012). Dignity therapy: Final words for final days. New York: Oxford University Press.

## Questions asked during Dignity Therapy

Tell me a little about your life history, particularly the parts that you either remember most, or think are the most important. When did you feel most alive?" "Are there specific things that you would want your family to know about you, and are there particular things you would want them to remember?" "What are the most important roles you have played in life (family roles, vocational roles, community service roles, etc.)? Why were they so important to you, and what do you think you accomplished in those roles?" "What are your most important accomplishments, and what do you feel most proud of?" "Are there particular things that you feel still need to be said to your loved ones, or things that you would want to take the time to say once again?" "What are your hopes and dreams for your loved ones?" "What have you learned about life that you would want to pass along to others? What advice or words of guidance would you wish to pass along to your (son, daughter, husband, wife, parents, others)?" "Are there words or perhaps even instructions you would like to offer your family to help prepare them for the future?" "In creating this permanent record, are there other things that you would like included?"

<https://www.dignityincare.ca/en/toolkit.html>

# THANK YOU

- International Institute for Reminiscence and Life review
- Association of Personal Historians
- The National Creative Aging Center
- Gerontology Society of America
- American Society on Aging
- The Birren Center for Autobiography and Life Review
- Alzheimers UK “This is me”
- [www.dementiauk.org/life-story-work/](http://www.dementiauk.org/life-story-work/)
- Australian Government Using Reminiscence with People with Dementia
- <http://www.storycentre.ca/>

**The National Telehealth  
Counselling Service for Residential  
Aged Care is now accepting  
referrals**

**[swin.edu.au/telehealthcounselling](http://swin.edu.au/telehealthcounselling)**



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