Group Reminiscence for Older Adults with SMI by Elder Peers

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Disclaimer

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Reminiscence therapy for older adults with SMI: Older adult peer services

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Reminiscence therapy is a non-pharmacological intervention that improves self-esteem and provides older adults with a sense of fulfillment and comfort as they look back at their lives.

Although reminiscing involves recalling past events, it encourages older adults to communicate and interact with a listener in the present.

Reminiscence sessions may be formal, informal, one-on-one, or in a group setting.

Reminiscence therapy is when someone shares memories from the past. Older adults typically lose short-term memory first, but are still able to recall older memories.

The goal of reminiscence therapy is to help seniors feel valued, contented, and peaceful. It can’t reverse or stop the progression of cognitive decline, but the stress reduction and positive feelings can improve an older adult’s mood, reduce agitation, and minimize challenging behaviors.
Reminiscence therapy tools

- Reminiscence therapy can occur at any time during an older adult’s day, with positive interactions during community activities, meals, home visits, daily activities such as preparation for bed, bath, or shower times, when exercising or assisting with walking, or even when assisting with medications. The key to effective reminiscence therapy is to use active listening skills, respond positively to the individual, ask follow-up questions, and allow time for silence, reflection and emotion. If appropriate, share your own experiences as an offer of support; peers are excellent at sharing life experience.

Examples of open-ended questions include the following.
- How are you getting along today?
- I enjoy eating lunch, do you have a favorite meal time?

http://www.mhaging.org/info/olus.html

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How is reminiscence different from remembering?

- Reminiscing is not the same as asking someone to remember something from the past.
- Remembering something specific, even from long ago, can be stressful for someone with dementia because they’re likely to feel pressured or put on the spot. In contrast, when a pleasant memory floats up and they share it with you, they’ll feel good.
Activities that encourage reminiscence

1. **Music** helps people reminisce and relate to emotions and past experiences. That’s why it’s often recommended for individuals with cognitive or functioning impairment.

2. **Pictures or keepsakes** that bring back memories are another excellent way to reminisce. Photos of family, friends, and important life events and hobbies stimulate memories.

3. **Smell and taste** are powerful ways to access memories. Recreation of special (holiday) and favorite foods evokes memories.

4. **Tactile activities** like painting, pottery, or other crafts can elicit memories.

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Certified Older Adult Peer Specialists (COAPS) and Reminiscence Therapy
Certified Older Adult Peer Specialists (COAPS)

- Older adults are **less likely** than other age groups to seek treatment from mental health professionals due to stigma and isolation (Byrne, 2000).

- COAPS services are provided in **non-traditional** setting by peers with **lived experience**.

- COAPS are **more effective** in engaging older adults than traditional professionals.

- COAPS provide **hope, empowerment, choices and social connectedness** to older adults that promote mental health recovery in a supportive environment.

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**What do COAPS do?**

- Certified Peer Specialists (CPS) work with older adults with behavioral health disorders to provide hope, empowerment, choices and opportunities that promote mental health recovery in a supportive environment through shared experiences.

- COAPS support older adults with behavioral health issues in various ways including: crisis support, development of community roles and natural supports, individual advocacy, self help, self improvement, interventions such as reminiscence therapy, as well as developing, maintaining and improving positive social supports and networks.

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Peer support is based on the premise of **mutuality**. Peers represent a form of social support that public health and medical research has long recognized as a **beneficial factor enhancing the quality of life and healthy living** of persons with any chronic medical conditions. Peer specialists, specifically educated in the issues of aging and the principles of wellness and coaching, represent a potent under-utilized resource to help others with serious mental illnesses in the pursuit of physical wellness and improved health outcomes.

COAPS share their life stories with older adults, with the expectation that the older adult is stimulated to share their story as well, which is a natural setting for reminiscence therapy.
• COAPS and consumers **share the benefit**
• COAPS express that areas of their own recovery are impacted through
• their work with older adults including **self-esteem and self-awareness**

“I know that I am not alone in the process of recovery.”

“I realize that I am stronger and healthier than I have ever been.”

“I see how my experience, coupled with training makes me uniquely useful in this field.”

“(Working with peers) keeps me motivated to excel in my own recovery.”

“Making connections with people and actively **listening to their stories** have been the real foundation of my own recovery and wellness.”
COAPS Bi-Directional Outcomes

What do you like best about your current job?

- Helping people
- Sharing my experience
- Seeing progress in individuals
- Advocating with and for peers
- Working with others
- Helping myself by helping others

COAPS Trainee Survey Results

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COAPS Bi-Directional Outcomes

**Personal Recovery**

What areas of your own recovery have been impacted by working with people in recovery?

- Gratefulness and gratitude
- Hope
- Personal Responsibility
- Sobriety
- Education and skills
- Empowerment
- Wellness
- Motivation
- Sense of purpose

How important is working with peers on your recovery?

- 68% of COAPS said extremely important

- Somewhat (14%)
- Extremely (68%)
- No answer (17%)

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VISIT OUR WEBSITE!!
olderadultpeerspecialists.org
Older Adults and Reminiscing

By Robert Walker, External Consumer Liaison, Mass DMH
• 600 stories collected in the Boston VA, 3000 nationwide

• Stories are gathered by structured interviews by interns in various social services professions

• Stories are reviewed by the Veteran and entered into the medical record
Purpose

• Allows all providers to know the Vet as a person, and their stories, rather than a Diagnosis

• Used in medical care, palliative care, and psychiatric care
Reminiscing Balls

- Invokes memories
- Simulates physical movement and mental acuity
- Infinitely customizable
- Make your own with markers and inflatable beach balls.
Settings for COAPS to Use These Tools

- Community mental health settings
- Geriatric Psychiatric Inpatient
- Public Housing
- Senior Centers
- Nursing Homes
- Medical Clinic
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