

Reminiscing and Life Review. A process basic to human existence is reminiscing and recounting past events, either alone or with friends. We spend much of our time talking, thinking, or writing about plans, goals, resources, successes, disappointments, and failures. This is especially true when facing death. Life review is a more formal process that involves reviewing present and past experiences. A life review experiencing form (Exhibit 26–2) is

Childhood:

1. What is the very first thing you can remember in your life? Go as far back as you can.
2. What other things can you remember about when you were very young?
3. What was life like for you as a child?
4. What were your parents like? What were their weaknesses, strengths?
5. Did you have any brothers or sisters? Tell me what each was like.
6. Did someone close to you die when you were growing up?
7. Did someone important to you go away?
8. Do you ever remember being very sick?
9. Do you remember having an accident?
10. Do you remember being in a very dangerous situation?
11. Was there anything that was important to you that was lost or destroyed?
12. Was church a large part of your life?
13. Did you enjoy being a boy/girl?

Adolescence:

1. When you think about yourself and your life as a teenager, what is the first thing you can remember about that time?
2. What other things stand out in your memory about being a teenager?
3. Who were the important people for you? Tell me about them. Parents, brothers, sisters, friends, teachers, those you were especially close to, those you admired, those you wanted to be like.
4. Did you attend church and youth groups?
5. Did you go to school? What was the meaning for you?
6. Did you work during these years?
7. Tell me of any hardships you experienced at this time.
8. Do you remember feeling that there wasn't enough food or necessities of life as a child or adolescent?
9. Do you remember feeling left alone, abandoned, not having enough love or care as a child or adolescent?
10. What were the pleasant things about your adolescence?
11. What was the most unpleasant thing about your adolescence?
12. All things considered, would you say you were happy or unhappy as a teenager?
13. Do you remember your first attraction to another person?
14. How did you feel about sexual activities and your own sexual identity?

Family and Home:

1. How did your parents get along?
2. How did other people in your home get along?
3. What was the atmosphere in your home?
4. Were you punished as a child? For what? Who did the punishing? Who was "boss"?
5. When you wanted something from your parents, how did you go about getting it?
6. What kind of person did your parents like the most? The least?
7. Who were you closest to in your family?
8. Who in your family were you most like? In what way?

Adulthood:

1. What place did religion play in your life?
2. Now I'd like to talk to you about your life as an adult, starting when you were in your twenties and up to today. Tell me of the most important events that happened in your adulthood.
3. What was life like for you in your twenties and thirties?
4. What kind of person were you? What did you enjoy?
5. Tell me about your work. Did you enjoy your work? Did you earn an adequate living? Did you work hard during those years? Were you appreciated?
6. Did you form significant relationships with other people?
7. Did you marry?
(yes) What kind of person was your spouse?
(no) Why not?
8. Do you think marriages get better or worse over time? Were you married more than once?
9. On the whole, would you say you had a happy or unhappy marriage?
10. Was sexual intimacy important to you?
11. What were some of the main difficulties you encountered during your adult years?
 - a. Did someone close to you die? Go away?
 - b. Were you ever sick? Have an accident?
 - c. Did you move often? Change jobs?
 - d. Did you ever feel alone? Abandoned?
 - e. Did you ever feel need?

Summary:

1. On the whole, what kind of life do you think you've had?
2. If everything were to be the same would you like to live your life over again?
3. If you were going to live your life over again, what would you change? Leave unchanged?
4. We've been talking about your life for quite some time now. Let's discuss your overall feelings and ideas about your life. What would you say the main satisfactions in your life have been? Try for three. Why were they satisfying?
5. Everyone has had disappointments. What have been the main disappointments in your life?
6. What was the hardest thing you had to face in your life? Please describe it.
7. What was the happiest period of your life? What about it made it the happiest period? Why is your life less happy now?
8. What was the unhappiest period of your life? Why is your life more happy now?
9. What was the proudest moment in your life?
10. If you could stay the same age all your life, what age would you choose? Why?
11. How do you think you've made out in life? Better or worse than what you hoped for?
12. Let's talk a little about you as you are now. What are the best things about the age you are now?
13. What are the worse things about being the age you are now?
14. What are the most important things to you in your life today?
15. What do you hope will happen to you as you grow older?
16. What do you fear will happen to you as you grow older?
17. Have you enjoyed participating in this review of your life?

NOTE: Derived from new questions and two unpublished dissertations:

Gorney, J. (1968). *Experiencing and Age: Patterns of Reminiscence Among the Elderly*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Chicago).

Falk, J. (1969). *The Organization of Remembered Life Experience of Older People: Its Relation to Anticipated Stress, to Subsequent Adaptation and to Age*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Chicago).

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useful in ordering questions related to each stage of life from earliest memories to old age. To conduct a life review, it is best to plan six to eight sessions. Each session requires approximately 45 minutes. During each session, the patient tells the story of a particular phase of life. Open-ended questions are preferable, and it may be helpful to record the session. The first session is primarily an introduction. The last session is the most important, as it is a summary or discussion of the meanings of the story. The patient may feel emotions of all kinds during any session, reflecting the emotions that he or she felt during the stage of life being discussed. It is the acknowledgment of emotional content, in part, that facilitates integration. In the summary, or perhaps earlier, an individual usually begins to feel a sense of integration with the past and present, a kind of wholeness to life. Unfinished business becomes finished. This is helpful in achieving peace.^{39,40} Levine used a meditative approach to the life review, reviewing the life story to honor and heal the past.³⁹