



The Multi-Sensory Reminiscence Activity Book

52 Weekly Group Session Plans
for Working with Older Adults

Sophie Jopling and **Sarah Mousley**

'This book offers the activity provider with access to the wealth of experience of the occupational therapist authors. With 52 multi-sensory reminiscence group session plans, it provides group facilitators with the ideas and resources to run seasonally themed activities that support reminiscence through the use of all the senses, stimulating not only long-term memory but also sensory-motor skills and function. This will be a great resource for care homes and day services for older adults, particularly those living with memory loss and cognitive difficulties.'

– Jackie Pool DipCOT, UK Head of Memory Care and Programming, Sunrise Senior Living

'From experienced group facilitators to those who are new to the role, these sessions are invaluable. They are practical and easy to use and the topics covered are diverse and stimulating. They would appeal to a wide age range within older adults.'

I have worked for 20 years facilitating groups for older adults and I would snap up this book.'

– Marion Betts, Senior Occupational Therapy Technical Instructor

'This book has a year's worth of well-chosen topics rather than relying on past events, which makes it much more inclusive and sustainable than many similar resources. The detailed descriptions of each session are very easy for anyone to follow.'

– Rayya Ghul, Occupational Therapy Educator, Canterbury Christ Church University

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*To Arianna and Marco.
Thank you for your enthusiastic support.*

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an ongoing interest in the writing of this book.*

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Introduction

This book contains 52 multi-sensory reminiscence group session plans incorporating a range of activities. It provides comprehensive guidance within the session plans to enable group facilitators to run an enjoyable and interactive multi-sensory group.

We are two qualified state-registered occupational therapists (OTs) with extensive experience working in the fields of both adult and older adult mental health in the National Health Service (NHS). We set up in private practice in 2011 and brought together our collective experience. We chose to work predominantly in residential care settings where there were a number of opportunities to apply the principles and methods of occupational therapy, which included running groups for older adults.

We have created, designed and written these group session plans. Each one has been 'tried and tested' by being run on multiple occasions with people with varying levels of function.

Whilst this book has been designed and written by OTs, it is intended for use by anyone working with older adults in a variety of settings (e.g. activity coordinators or care staff).

Engaging in purposeful and meaningful activity is essential to a person's health and wellbeing, and attending a regular activity group will help to contribute to this.

The following quality standard guideline from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) states: 'Older people in care homes are offered opportunities during their day to participate in meaningful activity that promotes their health and mental wellbeing' (NICE 2013).

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) states in its 'Dignity in Care' factors (under the subheading 'Choice and control...'): 'For people with dementia, reminiscence activities...may support the maintenance of a person's identity' (SCIE 2014).

The SCIE also include in their 'Key points from policy and research' that 'Participation in day-to-day life is crucial; involvement in meaningful activity is closely linked to choice and control' (Owen, Meyer *et al.* 2012; SCIE 2014).

A person's cognition (the way they receive and process information) can be affected by many factors. These could include various health conditions (acute and chronic), pain levels or medication being taken.

These group session plans provide cognitive stimulation and can be used with people who may or may not be living with dementia. Many people in the group, however, may be experiencing a degree of cognitive impairment.

Using a range of multi-sensory elements in the group sessions is valuable because people are stimulated by the senses (sight, taste, touch, smell and sound) in different ways. For example, one person may be stimulated by a particular smell, and another person by a particular piece of music or a picture. For many people more than one sense is involved. Each group session in this book offers an opportunity for one or more of the senses to be engaged and stimulated.

The reminiscence element provides depth and structure to the sessions as it engages with people's life experiences, values and past roles. This helps group members to re-establish and value their collective knowledge and experiences.

The group sessions are designed to encourage members to contribute their thoughts and opinions about the changes that they have experienced. There is a valuable connection between the past and the present, which is recognised within these sessions. In this book we use reminiscence in a stimulating, meaningful and engaging way, bringing a fresh approach to its use.

Using reminiscence techniques as part of a group is a valuable tool when working with those who have a cognitive deficit as it can help to restore a sense of self. By recalling one's achievements and life roles, confidence and identity can be affirmed.

Drawing on collective memories, such as world or UK events, helps to foster a feeling of unity within the group. Those who find conversation challenging when interacting about recent events, daily experiences or routines may find that talking about events that have happened in the past is easier and therefore a more relaxing and rewarding experience. Discussing collective experiences can generate conversations within the group, which can help those attending to get to know each other better through discovering areas of common ground, thereby helping to make new connections.

Why run these groups?

The aims of these groups (listed below) will enable those attending to access opportunities to:

- » experience multi-sensory stimulation through touch, taste, sight, smell and sound, enabling group members to engage in a meaningful way
- » experience cognitive stimulation
- » experience a sense of shared experience
- » revisit past roles, acknowledge present roles and reinforce the importance of these
- » celebrate achievements, skills and abilities, both past and present
- » recall positive feelings surrounding the group's theme
- » recall memories by using a variety of themed activities
- » be in an environment that encourages orientation in time, place and person through use of a current events activity
- » be in an environment in which group members can focus on the theme, enjoy themselves and have fun!

Below are some comments that have been made about these groups:

I shall never forget the first time I saw the occupational therapists in action. They actually managed to get my mum joining in and talking. It was like they had switched her on again. It wasn't just my mum, others found their voices again.

Mrs R. (daughter of a group member)

I noticed how engaging the group was and how much my grandmother enjoyed it and the difference in her interaction with others... It was like having the clock turned back.

Mr A. (grandson of a group member)

I remember things I thought I had forgotten. The group is the best way of keeping your mind going.

Mr G. (this group member particularly enjoyed and related to looking at the pictures and to the discussion activities)

When your independence is taken away from you, it's marvellous to be able to use your brain by coming to a group like this.

Mrs S. (this group member particularly enjoyed and related to listening to music and the tasting activities)

Setting up these groups

There are various aspects to setting up these groups that should be considered and put in place in order to make the group successful.

In order for each person to gain maximum benefit from attending this group, the following are useful points to consider when forming a group:

- » Is the person likely to remain settled and be able to maintain reasonable concentration and attention levels for the duration of the group?
- » Is the person able and willing to listen to others?
- » Is the person orientated sufficiently to engage in the group activities?

The following points will not determine a person's suitability for attending a group but will help the facilitators to ensure that they deliver the group in a way that will maximise each group member's health, wellbeing and safety.

- » Is the person diabetic or do they have a food allergy/intolerance? Do they experience difficulties with swallowing? (The group is multi-sensory and there are some sessions that involve food tasting.)
- » Are there any issues that may require urgent assistance to be given (i.e. epilepsy, incontinence or use of inhalers)?
- » Are there any sensitive issues or known traumas from the past that would be useful for group facilitators to be aware of?
- » Is the person prone to anxiety and/or low mood?
- » Does the person have a significant hearing/sight/speech impairment?

Knowing the needs of those who plan to attend the group will help the facilitators to position themselves next to individuals with particular needs (i.e. a sensory deficit), so enabling members to gain the most from attending the group.

Before each group session consider (or find out) the physical and mental wellbeing of each member of the group as this will affect your observations and interactions.

The ideal number of people attending a group will depend on both the level of the participants' ability and on their needs but should not exceed ten. In order for the group to function at its optimum, two facilitators are best.

The ideal environment for running a successful group session would be in a space that has minimal interruptions and can therefore provide the best therapeutic environment. Seating people around a table not only provides a focus for the group but also provides physical cues to aid maintenance of concentration, orientation and attention.

Other environmental aspects to consider include lighting levels (awareness of dim lighting or glare that can affect vision), comfort (i.e. chair height and ability to help maintain posture), space for wheelchairs, access to facilities (i.e. refreshments and toilets) and temperature of the room.

Attendance record

An attendance record can include not only the names of those who attend, but also the session title. It is useful to keep an attendance record for a number of reasons:

- » It helps to ensure that the people identified as having benefited from the group (based on previous assessment) are attending.
- » It enables the group facilitators to keep track of the group sessions that have been run.
- » It offers an opportunity to acknowledge or celebrate regular attendance.
- » It may be useful for group facilitators to be aware of sessions that have been missed by particular group members. This can help to reassure those who may be concerned that they are unable to recall a session when in fact they did not attend.
- » Fluctuations or changes in attendance of a group member can be clearly identified. The overall attendance of each person can be looked at in conjunction with other events (personal or health matters) that they may be experiencing. This can help with the general picture of a group member and may therefore contribute to how they are cared for.

Handovers, write-ups and feedback

It is useful to write a brief summary of each person's function in the group after each attendance. If the group is held in a care home or day centre it is most useful to do this write-up in a place where other people can see it and where the write-up contributes to an ongoing record of that person. Observations made in the group environment and later recorded in the notes are valuable, especially when a person's level of function has changed. These observations contribute to the ongoing care of that person.

In the write-up it may be useful to include some of the following, as appropriate:

- » level of participation
- » sequencing and processing (of thoughts or activity)
- » attention and concentration
- » mood and capacity to experience enjoyment
- » co-operation and collaboration with others
- » interest in activity and motivation
- » confidence and self-esteem
- » impact of any sensory impairment on activity performance
- » physical limitations and changes in physical health
- » health and wellbeing
- » fine and gross motor skills
- » social skills
- » orientation in time, place and person.


Sometimes verbal feedback to other staff members may be necessary in addition to a written summary after a group session. This is important when a group facilitator has either observed a strong reaction or been told information that may indicate a change in that group member and is, therefore, pertinent to their care.

Information that has been shared in the group situation should always be treated sensitively and respectfully.

Running these groups

The session plans in this book follow a similar format, which helps those attending to familiarise themselves with the group structure.

Some group sessions are designed to be run at a particular time of the year. Other sessions are not linked to a time of year and can be run at any time. Therefore, when choosing which session to run, it can be on a 'pick-and-choose' basis rather than according to the order in which the sessions are numbered.

The supplementary materials, such as pictures and fact cards, and all worksheets marked with  are available to download and print from www.jkp.com/voucher using the code JMACTIVITY.

Below is an explanation of each section of the group session plan.

Objectives

Objectives appear at the beginning of each session plan. They identify what the session aims to achieve.

Resources

At the beginning of each group session is a list of resources. The resource list is a guide to what is needed for each session. Some resources are identified as optional and these resources can be gathered over time. They might be found in charity shops, boot fairs, a flea market or from an online shop. The following resources are used on a regular basis for the sessions:

- » whiteboard or flipchart of approximately 90 x 60 cm in size (to be large enough for people sitting in a group to be able to see it)
- » dry-wipe pens and rubber
- » portable device to play music
- » recordable blank CDs if a CD player is being used
- » roll of label stickers
- » current events from the newspaper (local or national).

A number of the sessions list a map of the British Isles in the resources. It may be useful to add this to your basic resources.

Welcome

Receiving group members in a positive and warm way helps to make them feel welcome and can set the tone for the group. Feeling welcome can also help put people at ease and reduce anxiety levels that some group members may be feeling, which can in turn help their level of engagement in the group. It is valuable to observe group members arriving as it can provide the opportunity for group facilitators to briefly evaluate the wellbeing of members, both physically and emotionally, at that particular time.

Name stickers

I wish everyone wore name stickers all the time. It saves embarrassment.

Mr I. (a new group member)

Name stickers are a useful resource for newly formed groups or for groups that include people with significant memory loss. For group facilitators who may have a number of new people around a table, stickers help them to address people in a personable way. When introducing the idea of giving group members name stickers, the focus should be on how helpful it is for the facilitator to have a prompt for people's names. The name stickers also act as a useful tool for group members, who may find forgetting someone's name acts as a barrier to communication flow. This could contribute to a loss of confidence in social situations and could demonstrate publicly someone's memory difficulties. For established groups, facilitators can use their discretion as to whether name stickers continue to be required.

Look at and discuss this week's current events

The purpose of this part of the group session is to aid orientation in time and place. It is a way of orientating group members without the pressure of having to get the 'right' answer as can happen with the traditional orientation board method. It can draw the group together and open up informal discussion and act as a warm-up activity.

This activity works best when the pieces of news chosen are of general interest or something that can generate a conversation in the group – for example, news about places of interest, events (local, national or international), nature, science and culture or the weather. News of a distressing nature or about politics is best avoided.

The news chosen can be from either a local or national newspaper. It is helpful if there is a good picture to go with the news story as this can then be passed around the group for each person to see.

It is not advisable to bring a whole newspaper to the group session as it can be distracting. The articles chosen for the current events activity should be cut out and stuck onto plain paper, which makes it easier to pass around (if there is a picture of interest for group members to see). Generally a small variety of about 2–3 news items work best.

Reminiscence and discussion

The main discussion and reminiscence activity is normally at the beginning of the session. The aim is to include all group members and encourage the sharing of their opinions and experiences. It may be more achievable for people to be able to contribute to the discussion when reminiscing about familiar and past experiences. The information about the past provides a starting point for discussion that can then progress towards sharing opinions and making comparisons with how things are now.

Group facilitators can use information and anecdotes given during the discussion activity to enrich and personalise the rest of the group session and future sessions.

This activity may be a good opportunity to gain an understanding of a group member's ability to engage and participate. It can also give an indication of their level of functioning.

Fact cards

The fact cards activity occurs in many of the group sessions within this book because it helps to build people's confidence and draw the group together in shared experience. The fact cards may also provide an element of new learning.

Facts that are related to the session's theme are put onto individual cards. Group members take it in turns to select a card with a fact on and are given the option to read it out to the rest of the group. If they are unable to do so or choose not to read it out, they can select a card for the group facilitator to read out. Declining to read out a fact card may be due to a lack of confidence and this may change in future sessions. It can be a good opportunity to assess a person's level of functioning.

Whiteboard activities

The majority of the group sessions in this book include an activity where the whiteboard is used. It is important that, if using a portable whiteboard, it is placed somewhere where everyone can see it.

Many of the whiteboard activities in the book aid cognitive stimulation, concentration and social interaction. The whiteboard creates a shared focus for group members. Activities include brainstorming, word-finding and word puzzles. There may be some people who find these activities come more naturally to them than others. It is important to encourage each person to participate and contribute as far as they are able. This may require facilitators to offer prompts and encouragement to particular group members.

These activities can help to create a sense of cohesion within the group, and a feeling that the group has achieved something all together.

Multi-sensory elements to the group

A variety of multi-sensory elements are used in each session in order to ensure that there is stimulation and engagement for all group members. Where a multi-sensory activity occurs within a group session, it is identified with the relevant icon (see below).

The SCIE states: 'For people with cognitive difficulties, it is important to tap into all the senses to trigger memories. A picture to look at, an object to touch, a song or a poem to listen to or something to smell or taste can all take someone back in time, often to a very specific memory' (SCIE 2014b).



Music

The benefits of using music in therapeutic settings are well researched and documented. Music is used in all the sessions in this book, with each session including at least one or two pieces of music that relate to the theme of the session. A wide variety of music is used, from classical to contemporary. Group members are invited to give their opinions on what they have listened to (e.g. was it familiar and did they like it?). Group members' suggestions for other pieces of music that could be played can be incorporated into the session.

Choosing music that is appropriate to the age group of those attending the session will help to enhance their experience of the group as a whole. Therefore facilitators may wish to adapt some of the music choices suggested for the session.

Music helps to engage group members in conversation. It encourages expression and can prompt memories. Sometimes participants may sing along to familiar tunes and this can unify the group and foster a feeling of wellbeing.



Pictures

The majority of the group sessions in the book include pictures as part of the resources. The pictures that are used and passed round in the sessions can be laminated to increase their longevity. As some group members may have a sight deficit, an explanation of the picture shown may be necessary. This may also provide an opportunity for group members to help each other. Opportunities for further discussion are created, which can lead to a sense of cohesion within the group.



Tasting time

Many of the group session plans include having something to taste. The taste, smell and texture of food can be very evocative. It can bring back memories, not just of the particular food itself but also of a place, setting or time in the participants' lives.

Sometimes this part of the session may involve members having an opportunity to try something new or it may be that the item to taste will be familiar to them. It often generates discussion and creates a relaxed and fun element for the group.

It is important that, before the session begins, facilitators are aware of any group members who may have particular needs regarding diet, food allergies or swallowing issues.



Touch

A number of the group sessions in this book have items to pass around. These items help to enrich the experience of the theme of the group. They can be an aid to generating discussion, and group members can be asked questions such as: 'Is the item familiar to you?', 'Have you ever owned one like it/seen it before?', 'What do you think about it?', 'Do you think it is heavy/light?' and 'How would you describe the feel and the texture of it?'

Many people in the group will respond well to touching an object that is passed around. Group members who have a sensory deficit may gain a greater connection with the theme of the session during these activities.



Smell

Some group sessions in this book suggest items to smell. The sense of smell can be a very evocative one and can remind people of other times and associated feelings in their lives. The sense of smell is therefore used whenever possible in the group sessions in order to revive memories. Pictures of particular objects that have a distinctive smell can also be used to enhance memories associated with smell.

Encouraging group members to smell something that they are going to taste will provide an additional opportunity to use the sense of smell in most of the group sessions. People can then be asked questions such as: 'Did you like the smell?', 'Did it remind you of anything?' or 'Did you use something with that smell in the past?'

Ending the session


- » Summarise the session for the group by giving a brief recap of the activities that have been engaged in.
- » When the session is coming to a close, this is a good opportunity to acknowledge group members' efforts in attending.
- » Inform group members of the theme of the next session. This gives them the opportunity to think ahead and anticipate the next group session. Closing the group in a similar way each time is a prompt that the session has finished.

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