

# Speech Therapy & Alzheimer's

ADDRESSING THE COMMUNICATIVE  
NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH  
ALZHEIMER'S.

*Speech language pathologists have a primary role in evaluating, treating, and counseling adults with cognitive-communication disorders associated with Alzheimer's and dementia.*

Speech language pathologists (SLPs) work directly with individuals who have dementia to facilitate cognitive-communicative function. An example of an intervention that has research evidence to support its use is reminiscence therapy.

## WHAT IS REMINISCENCE THERAPY?

Reminiscence therapy involves the recalling of one's past memories and experiences. The process of reminiscing requires the activation of several cognitive domains such as attention, memory, and language. People with Alzheimer's often preserve old autobiographical memories to a greater extent than recent memories. Thus, the purpose of this type of therapy is to decrease the demands of impaired cognitive abilities and capitalize on those that are preserved.

## WHO IS IT USED WITH?

Reminiscence therapy is primarily used with individuals with mild to moderately-severe dementia with some ability to attend to social interaction and engage in verbal communication.

## WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE?

Reminiscence therapy often occurs in a group format. There is usually a central theme or topic each session, and activities generally involve multisensory modalities which are used to elicit memories (e.g., pictures, music, food).

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SLP?

The main role of the SLP when working with individuals with Alzheimer's is to facilitate communication. The SLP may use reminiscence therapy in order to promote their participation in activities of daily living and also to decrease their social isolation by promoting interaction between older adults and their loved ones.

## WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

When the implemented appropriately, the following outcomes have been reported by scientific research:

- Larger number of conversational contributions in social situations.
- Improved cognitive functioning (e.g., attention, memory).



- Decreased depression.
- Increased verbal and narrative aspects of discourse.

## REFERENCE:

Kim, E., Cleary, S., Hopper, T., Bayles, K., Mahendra, N., Azuma, T. & Rackley, A. (2006). Evidence-based practice recommendations for working with individuals with dementia: Group reminiscence therapy. *Journal of Medical Speech-Language Pathology*, 14(3), 23-34.

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## SPEECH THERAPY SERVICES:

The Indiana University Speech and Hearing Clinic provides assessment and therapy for individuals with acquired speech and language disorders, including adults with Alzheimer's and dementia. Individual therapy is designed to maximize each individual's communicative performance in his or her daily life. For more information about therapy services, please call (812) 855-6251.