

# Questions to stimulate conversation

To encourage positive conversations during phone calls or visits—in-person or virtually—questions can be a great starting point. You may want to focus on questions that invoke memories from the person living with dementia’s lifetime and avoid questions that provoke negative feelings. It can help to be patient and empathize with the person’s perspective, for example, even if they have shared the same story recently, let them enjoy telling it again.

You know the person living with dementia best, so look for questions related to their life. Did she have an interesting job she loves to talk about, or did he grow up with a big family and enjoys reminiscing about his childhood? Avoid asking, “Do you remember when...”. Below are some suggestions to get you started.

- What is your favourite place to visit?
- What was your favourite vacation/pet/job?
- What do you love most about your best friend/spouse/child?
- Tell me about your son/daughter/family/parents.
- What are you most proud of?
- Do you have a favourite family memory/holiday tradition?
- What is one of the best things that has happened to you?
- What are some of the things you are most grateful for?
- How would you like to be remembered?



- What is a piece of advice you’d like to give people/family?
- What was your wedding like? *(If you know the person has been married).*
- What attracted you to your wife/husband?
- What do you think of this painting / craft / item? *(while showing an item or picture of something).*
- *If you know something about their past history, start with a strong memory of theirs.* I was thinking about [pet’s name/incident] the other day. What was your favourite/funniest thing about [pet’s name/incident]?

- Do/did you enjoy gardening? Do you have a favourite place/flower/crop?
- What kind of music do you enjoy? Did you ever play a musical instrument when you were a child?
- What kind of chores did you have to do when you were growing up? Did you like doing that? What did you like/dislike about it?
- Were you an obedient or a misbehaving child?
- What is one of the happiest moments of your life?



# Connecting over shared experiences

It can be helpful to find shared experiences or events to reminisce about. Consider starting with an open question like, “Do you like weddings?” before sharing your own experience. Do your best to avoid saying, “Do you remember...”. Some examples of how you can encourage an exchange of a shared experience include:

- When I was a little kid, I used to ride my bike a lot. Did you like riding a bike? Where did you used to go? (*If they answer, “no”, you could ask, “How did you get around when you were a kid?”*).
- Did your car or truck ever breakdown? What happened? I remember the first time I had to change a tire – I was 16 years old!...
- My grandmother/mom/dad made the best [*kind of food*]. Do you like this too? What is your favourite food?
- Was your grandmother/mom/dad a good cook? Did you enjoy cooking/baking? What was your favourite thing to make or to eat?
- I played [*sport*] in school. What sport did you like to play or watch?
- I remember being on a farm and seeing animals/crops. [*I/my mom/dad grew up on a farm and had animals/crops*]. Were you ever on a farm? What kinds of animals/crops did you have?



- It’s been quite a while since I’ve been on an airplane. I think my last trip was to [*place*]. Do you like to travel? (*This might prompt the person to share about a work trip or a vacation*).
  - I know you love your kids and grandkids. I thought I would tell you a funny story about my [*son/daughter/relative/neighbor*]. Back in \_\_\_\_\_.
  - I picked up the newspaper this morning and it reminded me that I used to deliver the newspaper. Did you ever do that? What kinds of jobs/chores did you do when you were young?
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- I’m looking out my window. I see some \_\_\_\_\_ out there, and I also see \_\_\_\_\_. What do you see?
  - I used to go shopping at [*store*]. Did you ever go shopping there? The other day I went to the store and I bought \_\_\_\_\_.
  - My pet [*animal*] is sitting right here. Do you have a pet? I had a pet [*animal*], named \_\_\_\_\_, when I was little. He used to \_\_\_\_\_.

(Inspired by material from Chilliwack Hospice Society, Earla Dawn and LifeBio).