



COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES
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LIFE-REVIEW (REMINISCENCE) THERAPY

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Definition: A structured way to reminisce therapeutically about one's past.

Elements: Patients review their positive and negative memories, over the whole life-span, in order to build integrated, meaningful, mastery-enhancing life-stories that might reduce or prevent anxiety and depression. Integrative reminiscence focuses on resolving, or lending meaning and coherence to, past and current conflicts or other experiences. Instrumental reminiscence reviews successful past coping experiences to try to solve current problems. Creative reminiscence focuses on building a meaningful life-story by stimulating the imagination and artistic expression of past experiences.

Application: Done individually or in groups, in older adults and other age groups, on its own or in combination with other therapies (e.g. cognitive therapy, narrative therapy, creative therapy).

Related procedures: Activation of memories, story-telling, *narrative therapy*, mastery training, expressive writing, psychoanalytic free association, *using metaphor*, *solution-focussed therapy*, *giving perspective*.

1st Use? Butler (1963)

References:

1. Bohlmeijer E, Smit F, & Cuijpers P (2003) Effects of reminiscence and life review on late-life depression: a meta-analysis. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 18, 1088-1094.
2. Bohlmeijer E (2007) Reminiscence and depression in later life. PhD Dissertation. Amsterdam: Free University.
3. Butler RN (1963) The life-review: an interpretation of reminiscence in the aged. *Psychiatry* 26, 65 – 76.
4. Watt LM & Cappeliez P (2000) Integrative and instrumental reminiscence therapies for depression in older adults: intervention strategies and treatment effectiveness. *Aging and mental health*, 4, 166-177.

Case Illustration (Bohlmeijer 2007)

Robert aged 66 had been depressed since being made redundant 5 years earlier and then starting a consultancy business despite having enough money. To answer why he felt miserable and why work, achievement and money were so important to him he joined a life-review group (4 people aged at least 55, seven 2-hour sessions).

Two memories stood out in Robert's stories. First, as a small boy he'd played outdoors a lot, giving an intense feeling of freedom that ended abruptly when he started school. In group discussion the topic of 'lost freedom' placed his problematic transition from work to more free time in a more positive light. After this he felt he could again enjoy the freedom he'd abandoned in his youth.

The second distinctive memory concerned Robert's drive to achieve. Throughout his schooling he'd always been the youngest in his class and felt he had to push himself, especially as he found schoolwork less easy than his rival older brother

did and because good grades earned his father's attention. Later Robert wanted to achieve a good social position to obtain security through a good income. During the life-review meetings Robert came to see that his drive for success stopped him enjoying freedom like that he'd had in early childhood but gave him other things he wanted: social status, interesting work, and financial security.

In sessions 6 and 7 Robert began to realise he wanted to enjoy freedom in the years ahead and discussed what this might involve and how to achieve it. He became keen to contact and spend ample time with friends he'd neglected because of his work ambitions. Asked for a *metaphor* for his life, Robert replied 'I am a traveler in the desert; this is my yearning for freedom more than a need to find the right way'. After the life-review group Robert felt much less depressed and more optimistic about his future.