

StoryCorps®

Memory Loss Initiative



Commemorate

The Memory Loss Initiative Toolkit

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This toolkit will introduce you to the StoryCorps Memory Loss Initiative's Commemorate program, and explain how it will benefit your clients and your organization.

It will equip you with the knowledge and tools to record your own Commemorate interviews, and it has been crafted to serve the needs of those living with memory loss.

We want you to join us in our mission to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of their lives. By partaking in this journey with us, you will tell people that their lives matter and that they will not be forgotten.

Let's begin.

STORYCORPS

StoryCorps is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives.

Since 2003, StoryCorps has collected and archived more than 30,000 interviews from over 60,000 participants. Each conversation is recorded on a free CD to share, and is preserved in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. StoryCorps is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind, and millions listen to our weekly broadcasts on NPR's *Morning Edition* and at storycorps.org.

THE MEMORY LOSS INITIATIVE

StoryCorps launched the Memory Loss Initiative in 2006 to reach out to people affected by memory loss. This project supports and encourages those with memory loss to share their stories and have meaningful conversations with people they love.

Our commitment to serving the memory loss community extends further to educate people about memory loss and to celebrate the rich lives of those whose memory may be faltering. Our current work focuses on sharing our accumulated experience recording interviews with the organizations that directly serve memory loss communities.



Since the launch of the Memory Loss Initiative, StoryCorps has worked with more than 180 partner organizations to record over 1,800 interviews with people living with memory loss.



This toolkit is designed for organizations like yours that provide care to those living with memory loss.

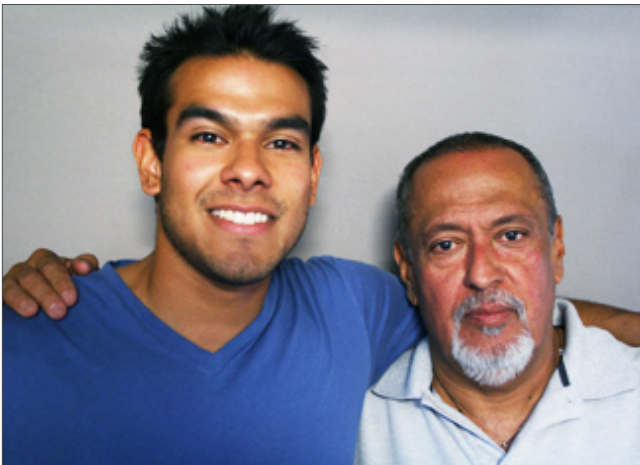
If you are reading this toolkit, you are likely someone who suggests new ideas and develops new programs at your organization. People with this kind of motivation and creativity are exactly the right people to bring this innovative program to those who need it most. Consider this toolkit our invitation to join us in our mission to celebrate the lives of those living with memory loss.

EMPLOYEES, STUDENTS, & VOLUNTEERS CAN:

- Record intimate conversations between those living with memory loss and their family, loved ones, and friends.
- Help preserve the life stories of the clients they serve.
- Engage those living with memory loss in stimulating, personal interaction.

ORGANIZATIONS CAN:

- Add a dynamic, flexible, person-centered care program to their roster of activities.
- Incorporate arts-based activities into their institution.
- Facilitate meaningful interaction between clients and their families.
- Assist staff in getting to know clients better.
- Demonstrate the organization's commitment to personalized, holistic, enriching care.
- Celebrate the voices of those living with memory loss.



Many organizations who serve those living with memory loss have already recognized the value of the reminiscence experience. The process of reviewing one's life and telling stories has great therapeutic value and is an excellent way for organizations to work with their clients.

The Commemorate interview experience is a powerful way to engage in reminiscence work. Our model focuses on the individual and creates a “no wrong answer” environment, fostering communication between the Storyteller and the people they know and love.

The interviews from the StoryCorps Memory Loss Initiative have repeatedly demonstrated the value of personal conversations to clients, their families, and the organizations that serve them. By affirming the value of the individual through attentive conversation, Commemorate interviews can directly combat the feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and anxiety that many who live with memory loss face.

By listening closely to one another, we can help illuminate the true character of this nation, reminding us all just how precious each day can be.

Dave Isay
Founder & President, StoryCorps





The Commemorate interview:

- **Affirms the value of the individual** by dedicating a full hour to record the stories and experiences of one person.
- **Strengthens bonds** between clients and their caregivers through the sharing of stories and feelings during the interview.
- **Fosters relationships** between caregivers and your organization by inviting them into your reminiscence activities, and showcases your commitment to individualized care.
- **Preserves a legacy** of individuals at a time when their memories are slipping away.
- **Offers a simple, successful activity** that can boost a client's self-esteem.

The flexible nature of the Commemorate program means you can choose the number of interviews you record and the frequency of the activity. Our model also encourages creative use of the interviews you collect, giving you more opportunities to engage clients, caregivers, and staff beyond the interview itself.

We want you to love collecting these interviews and make this a regular part of your institution's programming.

At its heart, a Commemorate interview is a conversation between two people talking about their lives. It offers a rare experience—an uninterrupted, intentional, and intimate encounter where one person honors another by asking about his or her life.

We believe in the value of these conversations so strongly that we built our entire organization around this core idea, and developed the following method to guide our work:

1. People are invited to participate and given time to prepare.
2. The interview is an uninterrupted 40-minute conversation that takes place in a quiet location.
3. The content is personal—the purpose is to evoke stories, not collect facts.
4. The interview is recorded, and a copy of the audio is given to the participants.

This method ensures that the Commemorate interview experience offers our participants something most conversations don't have—a sense of importance, a degree of care, and the knowledge that someone is truly listening.

The exact shape of the interview depends on the participants. Sometimes it is about telling jokes and recalling the good times in a person's life. Sometimes it provides a way for people to preserve their wisdom and legacy for their families. Sometimes people cry, and they often say, "I love you."

There is no right or wrong way to have a Commemorate experience. We have found that people enjoy it best when they allow themselves to get personal during the interview.

TRACK 1



The best way to understand the interview experience is to listen to stories recorded through the Memory Loss Initiative.

Listen to track 1 of the Memory Loss Initiative companion CD. You will hear a few minutes of the conversation Carol Kirsch had with her daughter, Rebecca. Carol is living with Alzheimer's disease.

THE STORYTELLER



The Storyteller is the person being interviewed. The interview is about listening to this person and his or her stories. Storytellers should be prepared to talk about themselves. In most cases, the Storyteller will be the person living with memory loss.

THE INTERVIEWER



The Interviewer is charged primarily with asking the questions. This person should create a short list of questions in advance, and be prepared to take the interview wherever the Storyteller wants it to go. The Interviewer will most likely be a family caregiver, staff member, or volunteer.

THE FACILITATOR



The Facilitator is responsible for making the participants feel comfortable, operating the recording equipment, and keeping track of time. This person may also take notes and ask questions if appropriate. Having a Facilitator allows the participants to talk without worrying about the technical aspects of the recording. The Facilitator should be a staff member or volunteer at your organization.

SECTION 1



Recording Interviews

Walks you through the entire recording process. Here you will find instructions and tools to use when recording your Commemorate interviews and suggestions for sharing the interviews you collect.

SECTION 2



How to Create a Successful Commemorate Program

Encourages you to make Commemorate interviews part of your regular activities. We offer case studies and advice illustrating how this can work, and suggest ways you can build your program by engaging the community.

SECTION 3



Tools & Resources

Contains helpful resources to assist you in planning and implementing your Commemorate program, including a list of literature referencing the value of reminiscence work.

Thank You

We want to thank everyone who has helped shape the StoryCorps Memory Loss Initiative.

We want to thank everyone who has ever participated in a StoryCorps Memory Loss Initiative interview.

We want to thank every partner organization that has invited us into their space and welcomed us into their community.

And we want to thank everyone who is reading this toolkit. Because you are passionate about the work you do and care so deeply about serving those who suffer from memory loss, the Memory Loss Initiative continues through you and your efforts.

A special thanks to Erin Browning Ball, MA, CCC-SLP, who collaborated with StoryCorps on the creation of this toolkit. Erin currently works as a speech-language pathologist in a long-term care facility in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, and teaches and consults nationally on the diagnosis and treatment of speech, language, memory, cognitive, and swallowing disorders in the geriatric population. Erin's years of experience in hospital, outpatient, and home settings were invaluable in the writing of this work, and she served as a welcome guide between StoryCorps and the memory loss community.

To read more about Erin and her work, visit her website, awayfromthemind.blogspot.com.

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CONTACT US



The advice in this toolkit is based on StoryCorps' extensive experience recording interviews and partnering with memory loss organizations across the nation. Each organization is unique and will face its own challenges, so we hope you will use the information in this toolkit to create a custom program for your organization.

If you have had a good experience with this toolkit, or especially if you haven't, please let us know.

Send us your feedback:

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