

# Module 4

Relating to the person with  
*challenging behaviours or unmet needs:*  
Personal histories, life journeys and memories



# Key questions

- How are residents' personal histories, life journeys and memories meaningful in terms of who they are today?
- How does this matter for safety and care, particularly where there are in play
  - *challenging behaviours or unmet needs?*
  - diverse languages, cultures and faith backgrounds?

# Objectives

In this module we will:

- explore principles for knowing ourselves and others through our past, present and imagined future lives
- consider how residents' personal histories, life journey and memories impact on their needs and behaviours
- consider how a better understanding of a person's personal history, life journey and memories can contribute to safety, communication and care
- develop strategies for communicating and doing safety and care through knowing the person as a whole over time.

‘The most behaviours we have noticed is just being resistive to care when they don’t have understanding. Because they come ... we all have backgrounds ... like being an independent person, a human being, the whole life, and then suddenly, because your condition declines, but somehow you still have the insight of what you were before, and still believing you’re living in the same environment in the corner of your own mind.

‘It’s very challenging when they come here, first thing, they come in a new environment that’s not home. We try to make it as a home, but it’s not home for them when they first come in. It takes a while for us to make them feel that this is their home as well.’

(Registered nurse, Indian background)

# Outline

1. Exploring who we are: our past, present and imagined future lives
2. Understanding the influence of the past on the present self
3. Communicating the whole person, in 'person-centred' care
4. Strategies for doing safety and care for the whole person

# ***Segment 1***

***Exploring who we are: our past,  
present and imagined future lives***



# Individual activity

Write down five things about your past that you consider make you the person you are today and that you would feel comfortable sharing with another person.

- Why did you choose these particular memories?
- How are they meaningful to you?
- How well do these five things capture who you are?



# Small group activity

- In groups of three or four, discuss and group the responses.
- What do the responses show about your understanding of the relationship between your past and present? In what ways are these memories meaningful for you?
- How well do these 5 things capture who you are?

**Video 4.1.** Consider the perspectives of two care workers, two nurses, and a manager on the value of exploring connections between past and present for those you care for.

# Bringing it together

What key ideas have emerged about how our personal histories, life journeys and memories have meaning in our lives today?

## **Segment 2**

***Understanding the influence of the past  
on the present self***

‘... you’re not just thinking that person in front of you is not capable of things, she was someone else before. Thinking, flashbacks, the kind of things they have been doing before. Just thinking those things, and just acknowledging their thoughts. Just providing them the care, the person in front of you, their whole life, and what their needs and their feelings could be.’

(Registered nurse, Indian background)

**Video 4.2.** While watching the video, consider the perspectives of a trainer, a nurse and a care worker on how the past influences the present.

# Individual or pair activity

Think of a person you currently care for.

- What do you know about their past? What don't you know?
- How do you think their past influences their needs and their behaviour in the present?
- How do you think this might affect safety and care? What options do you consider?
- How do you explain some of the difficulties? How do you confirm your own understanding?

# Small group activity

In groups of four, discuss and group the responses.

- What do the responses show about how you understand another person?
- How does your understanding of a person's past influence how you:
  - know them now?
  - communicate with them?
  - decide what not to do?
  - make decisions about appropriate safety and care?



# Bringing it together

What key ideas have emerged about:

- how we understand another person, both their present and their past?
- how we understand the relationship between a person's past and their current needs and behaviours?
- how this influences *communicating* and *doing* safety and care?

## **Segment 3**

# ***Communicating the whole person, in 'person-centred' care***

‘You know, to be person-centred, but to find things, normally you go into a person’s room and you’ll see family photos, that they love horses or dogs, and you pick up something to actually have some discussion with them ...

And it struck me that it’s probably something we don’t talk to staff about. About how you find those connections, apart from we always say, “That’s our policy, you go to the care plan, that’s where the information is”, but the reality is unfortunately we’re not though, that doesn’t always happen.

We have to also then think of other cues and other ways we can get that information. Sometimes it is by talking to other staff members, but that can be skewed as well, that becomes difficult.’ (Trainer, Australian background)

# Individual or pair activity

- Consider the ways you use to find out about a person you are caring for.
  - Who can you ask?
  - Where can you look?
- Consider the ways you communicate with other staff and family about the personal history or life journey of someone you care for.
- Write down an example of a time when you found out something important about the personal history of someone you care for and communicated it to someone else.
- What does this tell you about the person? About yourself?

**Video 4.3.** Consider the perspectives on communication of four carers and a family member in the following video.

# Small group activity

- In groups of three or four:
  - exchange examples of times when you discovered something important about the personal history of someone you care for and communicated it to someone else
  - exchange examples of times when you were not told something significant about the personal history of someone you care for.
- How might this impact on safety and care for you and the person you care for?

# Bringing it together

What key ideas have emerged about:

- how we discover important information about the personal history of someone we care for?
- how we communicate this information to others?
- why we should / should not do this?
- how this influences doing safety and care together when we communicate (or don't communicate) this with others?

## **Segment 4**

# ***Strategies for doing safety and care for the whole person***



**Video 4.4.** Consider the perspectives of four care workers, two nurses and a manager on possible strategies for caring for the whole person.

‘So we, for men, they recommend that we make an area that looks like an office, or creating a shed or something for them, that they can work in. We need to know what happened in the bad past history, that’s also helpful for us, to avoid those things with him. Like noise he didn’t cope with. So we have happy hours down here on Thursdays, which is quite noisy for him, so we try to limit, minimise that. We either take him for a walk upstairs when we’re having happy hour downstairs, or alternatively, move the piano thing happening or anything loud, away from him. And he has particular movies that he likes. I don’t know the names because it’s been a while.’

(Registered nurse, Indian background)

# Small group activity

- Consider together the different ways you do safety and care based on how you know someone you care for as a whole person (their past, present and imagined future).
- Think of a person you currently care for and how you know them in terms of their past (work / interests / life journey)
  - What meaningful activities do you provide the person with?
  - What activities do you minimise/avoid for this person?
  - How does this matter for safety and care?

# Bringing it together

What key ideas have emerged about:

- the value of understanding the whole person over time (past, present, future)?
- how knowing a person as a whole can suggest meaningful activities to engage them in?
- how engaging a person in meaningful activities can make a difference for their safety and care?

# *Reflection and application*

‘Like you could ask anyone in the unit, “Tell me about ...” and they’d be able to tell you about where he went to school, how far they’d walk. Everything. They could tell you their life history so well, and that’s why they don’t have any behaviours, because they know, they can talk about it, if they notice any triggers they know how to divert them because they know the person. They know what language is relevant to use, they know what cues to pick up on.’

(Enrolled nurse, Australian background)

# Bringing it all together

- What have you learnt from this module?
- How do you see the role of personal histories, life journeys and memories in how you care for others safely?

# What next?

*On your next shift:*

- Find out something new about the life journey of a person you care for by asking a family member or staff member.
- Ask about an object / photo / ornament in a person's room and then use this as a cue to have a conversation with them while you are caring for them.



# What next?

*Over the next week* – ‘Person of the week’:

- Working together (not just ‘lifestyle’ care workers or ‘diversional therapists’), focus on one person you care for at a weekly meeting or handover.
  - What knowledge about the whole person could be shared to better understand them and their needs?
  - What meaningful activities do they participate in?
  - How did you decide what would be meaningful?

(contd over)

(contd)

- Plan and facilitate a meaningful activity for this person, for this week.
- At the end of the week, what have we learned/noticed? What could be done differently? How does this matter for safety and care?

# Further resources

- Alzheimer's Association information relevant to this module, for example,

[https://www.fightdementia.org.au/files/NATIONAL/documents/FamilyAndFriendsMatter\\_english.pdf](https://www.fightdementia.org.au/files/NATIONAL/documents/FamilyAndFriendsMatter_english.pdf)

- Movie *Still Alice*, <https://nt.fightdementia.org.au/nt/news/still-alice>