



Massachusetts Department of  
Developmental Services (DDS)



Massachusetts Councils  
on Aging (MCOA)



Center for Developmental Disabilities  
Evaluation and Research

## LIFE STORY

**Creating Life Stories** with an individual with dementia can have far-reaching benefits for the individual, caregivers and the meaningful people in the individual's life. It records important details and events from the individual's past and present. Creating a Life Story book helps the individual recall past events, which may improve the individual's mood as they reminisce about the past. Life Story books foster communication, strengthen relationships, and promote person centered care. Creating a Life Story involves working with the individual and people, who know him or her, to gather facts about their life, important events, interests, preferences, as well as gathering photographs or even news stories or memorabilia that help tell that individual's unique life history.



### Creating a Life Story

- Life Stories can take many forms, from creating a collage to creating an actual book, for example by putting pages in a three-ring binder that include text along with visual references, such as photographs from the past.
- Photographs serve as references and reminders of important people, places, and events.
- Caregivers and family members engage the person in conversations about their life and record information that can be used.
  - As a reference for future conversations.
  - To help caregivers get to know the individual—their interests, preferences, and what helps them now stay happy and calm.
- There are many templates with questions to guide information gathering, one example can be found [here](#).
- Some general areas you may cover in creating an individual's Life Story will include basic facts, such as their name, nickname, family members, where they've lived, work or day program, friends, spiritual beliefs and practices, personal care preferences, interests and favorite activities, what makes them happy, sad, angry, and things that make them feel calm or safe when they get upset.

### Using a Life Story Book

#### DO

- Use Life Story books to have conversations between caregivers and the individual.
  - Foster the use of speech and conversation skills.
  - Maintain and strengthen relationships with family and caregivers.
- Use photographs or visual references, as well as text, to
  - Guide the conversation.
  - Help the individual recall events.
  - Redirect the individual if he or she gets stuck.
- When the individual gets upset or sad, look at the Life Story book together to help calm him or her.
- Caregivers should refer to the Life Stories to understand the individual's preferences about
  - Personal care.
  - Ways to help the person when they are upset and ways to provide comfort.

#### DON'T

- DON'T use the Life Story to quiz the individual.
- DON'T correct or contradict the individual if they don't recall correctly who or what something is.

#### REMEMBER

- Always be reassuring and supportive.
- Life Stories should be used as a positive activity.