

Histories & Memories

Tracing the Heart of Care Through Stories That Shaped Us

Exploring the topic of memories and histories is crucial for caregivers because it gives us a deeper understanding of how our words, actions, and presence impact those we support.

Each of us brings with us the weight of our past experiences—our upbringing, the environment we were raised in, and even the history of our families. All these factors shape who we are today. For example, how we handle stress or what makes us anxious might be learned behaviors, influenced by our families or early life experiences. If these patterns hold true for us, they are likely true for the people we support as well.

It's essential to reflect on the experiences and memories that have shaped others and how they may affect their interactions with us. Negative memories can come from all sorts of life circumstances. For the people we support, we need to consider histories that include things like:

- Separation from others
- Rejection from others
- Frequent moves/housing insecurity
- Institutionalization
- Bullying/degradation
- Significant medical problems
- Extended hospitalizations
- Overcorrection
- Shame & Disappointment
- Barriers to communication
- Isolation
- Physical restraints
- Medical restraints
- Trauma(s)

The key takeaway here is that understanding the histories of the people we support is essential to recognizing their reactions. When someone is responding in a way that seems out of proportion, it's often a sign they don't feel safe or loved. Too often, caregivers focus on the behavior itself rather than considering the underlying causes. This approach can unintentionally cause more harm. When someone is hurting or scared, what they need most is to be nurtured, not to be taught or corrected. It's crucial to acknowledge that when someone reacts out of fear or pain, it's not about learning, but about feeling safe and supported.

Our role is 2-fold: to recognize the impact of history and memories have on others and to create new memories for the person we support – memories of goodness, our goodness and their goodness.

We use our 4 tools to teach the person that they are: good, safe, loved, important, valued, worthy, etc. These new memories begin to take root and overshadow the bad memories.

It is through these intentional, repeated acts from us that the people we support will find healing from their negative history and memories.

What Did John Say?

“Moral memories are how we spiritually interact with the world. When these memories are sad and disorienting, they reside like haunting ghosts in the hidden corners of our being; in a sense, they whisper to us what clinicians will later call behaviors. Behaviour is the visible part of toxic weeds; memories are the roots. They are deep, often not known, and not intellectual, but moral memories. The use of behavioral techniques is like pulling weeds from the surface but leaving the roots intact. Gentle Teaching goes for the creation of new moral memories that lead the person to feel safe and loved and then “behaviors” begin to fade away”

Q1

In what ways are negative history and memories impacting the person you support?

What behaviour's are you seeing that might come from these memories?

Q2

Q3

How can you specifically and intentionally teach new memories to the person you support?

Connecting to Our Purpose

At the heart of Gentle Teaching lies the purpose to nurture, connect, and sustain the human experience of connectedness, companionship, and community. The central purpose aligns deeply with Dr. John McGee's understanding of Histories and Memories, that is, the belief that every person carries within them a story deserving of honour, not correction. John taught that our shared histories and lived memories form the soil from which trust, safety, and belonging can grow.

Through Gentle Teaching, we are invited to see each interaction as a moment to rewrite narratives shaped by fear or isolation, and to co-create new memories rooted in love and companionship. In doing so, we do not erase the past but redeem it, holding space for one another's stories while nurturing relationships that sustain community and affirm our shared humanity.