

# EVERGREEN

SENIOR LIVING

## Life Unrehearsed™



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LEARN HOW TO LIVE  
WITH PEACE AND JOY

*"They may forget what you said – but they will never forget how you made them feel."*

*- Carl W. Buehner -*



## LIFE UNREHEARSED™: FINDING JOY IN THE MOMENT

Those with memory impairment must rely on the care and compassion of others. For caregivers, there is help and hope!

At Evergreen Senior Living, we care for those living with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. Our compassionate and knowledgeable staff at The Legacy: Memory Support understands the needs of residents with progressive memory loss and dementia and receives specialized training to address these unique challenges. This training embraces a unique philosophy called Life Unrehearsed™.

Life Unrehearsed™ allows life for those with memory care challenges to unfold with daily happiness and joy. Our philosophy combines gentle structure and proven approaches with compassionate, flexible care. It recognizes each interaction as unique and honors each individual by focusing on their life story, interests and skills. Our desire with the Life Unrehearsed™ philosophy is to meet your loved ones in their moment, promoting positive interactions and daily success.

## LIFE UNREHEARSED™: A BLEND OF APPROACHES

The techniques used in Life Unrehearsed™ were developed over time with the philosophy that every single person who suffers from memory impairment requires an approach as unique as their personality.

With this understanding, the most successful elements that promote independence and individuality were incorporated from proven methods and blended with compassion to formulate the foundation for Life Unrehearsed™.

With empathy, kindness and flexibility, we can meet an individual in their moment and adapt our responses to this unique moment. This may mean validating feelings, engaging in therapeutic fibbing, gentle redirection or a combination of these effective methods.

Because each situation is unique, our Life Unrehearsed™ philosophy embraces flexibility as approaches must always be adapting and ever-changing to meet an individual's specific need at a specific moment.

What may work in one situation may not be successful the next time, so it's important to gain knowledge and practice the techniques. Here's a look at these approaches and examples of how they can be used.

## THERAPEUTIC FIBBING

Is it possible to reduce caregiver stress while minimizing the stress of those with cognitive impairment? The answer is yes, with the help of the controversial approach of therapeutic fibbing. While some feel uncomfortable going against societal rules that praise fact over fiction, the benefit of therapeutic fibbing for those with memory loss has been well documented and outweigh personal preference. Therapeutic fibbing is a creative communication technique that simply recognizes that it is more important to help individuals with memory loss to feel comfortable, safe and secure rather than force them to recognize a true reality. It has been shown to reduce anxiety, fear and sadness. As its name indicates, the approach involves telling a "fib," not to deceive, but to spare grief and anxiety at a given moment.

Is therapeutic fibbing appropriate for the moment? That is up to the individual caregiver. Here are some tips to consider:

Those with cognitive impairment and short-term memory loss are often in a place that is hard to understand; forcing reality on these individuals is often not a successful path.

Studies have shown this technique to decrease anxiety and agitation; feeling comfortable with the concept may take time.

This technique is often useful to comfort those re-living the death of a spouse or loved one.

## VALIDATION

Validation techniques became prevalent in the 1960's when a more personal approach was becoming desired within the senior care community as a whole. This method requires a caregiver to showcase empathy through the verbal validation of feelings or concerns. This action then leads to increased confidence and higher satisfaction with interactions. Successful validation starts with asking questions and verifying needs. Once a need or concern is understood, a caregiver can validate or repeat the need or concern. This makes an important connection for those with memory impairment, one that leads to positive, successful interactions.

Here are some helpful tips concerning validation:

Validate by repeating a concern, and when possible, express personal agreement with the concern to showcase empathy.

Don't confirm or deny frame of reality. This can break trust and make the caregiver/loved one relationship more challenging.

Remember behaviors may reflect a need; trying to discover this need may be very helpful in how one chooses to validate. For example, a demand to go home may be a reference to a desire to feel safe and secure rather than a physical location.

## REDIRECTION

The person living with dementia may exhibit repetitive behaviors, frustration and agitation. At times, redirection is a healthy way to gently move off of an undesired subject or action, and on to a more positive moment. Though it can take some amount of creativity, redirecting a conversation without contradiction can help all parties by reducing frustration and focusing on a positive topic of interest or attractive action.

How can caregivers use redirection to prevent or de-escalate challenging situations? Here are some ideas to incorporate:

It's important to provide validation of feelings (sad, anxious, mad, etc.) and reassurance before redirection. This shows understanding of the concerns and prompts cooperation.

Redirection to a conversation with a similar topic allows for a more natural transition and increases effectiveness. Look at this as a process, where you may need to gradually steer the conversation towards a new subject.

It's often helpful to have some redirection ideas planned in advance, especially for outings such as the doctor's office. Consider packing a small bag complete with pictures, snacks and "favorite things" that may help to divert attention in a positive fashion.



## COMPASSION

Of course, the most important part of our ever-changing and flexible Life Unrehearsed™ philosophy is compassion. It's the reason we offer care and the glue that holds our families together even during the difficult times. Caregiving can be stressful and leave one feeling underappreciated. The concept of Life Unrehearsed™ means understanding that while many things are out of our control, we should always have empathy and compassion to guide our decisions. Not every situation will be ideal; Alzheimer's disease and memory care deficits make this an impossible goal. Perfection will never have as much of a positive effect as consistent and compassionate care will.

How can caregivers put more compassion into all interactions? Here are some ideas to think about:

*During the tough moments, remember, it's okay to connect emotionally. Laughter, tears and hugs can be very strong bridges.*

*When needed, walk away. Taking a couple of minutes to calm down can do wonders for everyone involved.*

*Take care of yourself too! Remember that many senior care providers often offer short-term stays called respite care or adult day care programs which can be exactly what a caregiver needs to take a break.*

*Strive for positive, intentional interactions versus perfection. Something can be learned from every interaction.*

## ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDLY

Dementia-related behaviors are common and are typically a way for an individual to communicate a need. When determining ideal responses, it's important first to examine the behavior to determine if there are any underlying causes that can be remedied. Causes may include hunger, need to use the restroom, feeling sick or being in pain. Often, negative behavior is a result of one feeling uncomfortable, fearful, overstimulated, frustrated or scared. Did something trigger this behavior? Are basic needs met?

The primary dementia-related behaviors of note include confusion, repetition, suspicion, aggression, wandering and agitation. Many experience more negative behaviors in the later afternoon, a phenomenon called sundowning. While many factors are outside of a caregiver's control, they can ultimately impact all outcomes in a positive way. Encourage success with the following tips:

- Always make eye contact and address a loved one by their name.
- Use short, simple words and sentences.
- Pay attention to body language and non-verbal cues.
- Stay calm and don't take behaviors personally.
- Never argue or insist. Repeat, respond and suggest.
- Maintain consistent daily routines to ensure all basic needs are met.
- Be positive, focusing on what they can do, not what they cannot.
- Limit daily distractions and overstimulation.
- Use humor when appropriate; laughter can be therapeutic.
- Make sure that neighbors and friends are aware of the situation.
- Focus on safety and solutions, creating a new normal.
- Use touch and hugs to connect emotionally.
- Encourage nonverbal communication, such as body language (pointing, thumbs up, head nodding, etc.), which can help promote understanding and prompt successful interactions.
- Remember to be respectful, in every situation.

## SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

Moments come quickly. Our hope is to arm caregivers with examples, so they will be ready to let the next one unfold successfully using the Life Unrehearsed™ model – where flexible approaches and compassion are appropriately applied based upon an understanding of the disease, person, situation and successful approaches. For convenience, we have provided examples below that will help caregivers see how the approaches outlined can be applied.

## SETTING THE STAGE

Millie is 83 years old, living at home with her husband, Delmer. After 61 years of marriage, parenting four children and playing the support role to Delmer and her family, she was diagnosed with dementia two years ago.

Delmer is committed to keeping Millie at home as he provides the care she needs. Things have been going well, although Delmer has begun to notice changes in Millie's personality.

Millie was known as a loving and selfless person, always giving to others by serving the community through volunteering and various fundraising activities. Her passions include working with children and gardening.

Delmer is beginning to notice increased confusion and anxiety during the late afternoon hours. Normal routine activities such as gardening and preparing the evening meal are presenting challenges instead of joy. Millie begins asking Delmer, "Where are the kids, aren't they coming home?" repeatedly while pacing, wringing her hands and using an escalated tone of voice.

Strive to understand the reason for the behavior and ensure that basic needs are met. This situation seems to point to sundowning, commonly experienced with dementia, where confusion and agitation increase in the early evening and evening hours.

**Apply Therapeutic Fibs:** Delmer responds "Honey, let me help you with dinner. The kids will be home soon."

**Apply Validation:** Ask simple questions to identify feeling; let's assume it is worry. Delmer responds, "It sounds like you're worried." He gently touches her hand, reassures her that all is ok, and reminds her that good mothers often worry about their children.

**Apply Redirection:** Because Millie likes to garden, suggest they enjoy a glass of tea outside and admire their blooming garden, maybe even pick a few weeds.

Notice that each approach takes a different direction. You may try one and find that an alternative technique will work better based upon the situation.

## EXAMPLE # 2

Millie has been looking for her purse all over the house with no success. As time and the search continue, so does Millie's frustration. After an hour of searching, Delmer and Millie find it tucked in the back of her sweater drawer in her dresser. Millie immediately finds her wallet in the purse. She opens it and finds no money. "I knew she took it!" she exclaims tearfully. "I always have bills in here. How could she?"

Strive to understand the reason for the behavior and ensure that basic needs are met. This situation seems to indicate suspicion and paranoia, a common behavior often stemming from fear and loss of control.

**Apply Therapeutic Fibs:** Delmer says, "Oh shoot honey, I'm sorry I forgot to tell you I borrowed \$20 out of your wallet for gas the other day and haven't replaced it yet."

**Apply Validation:** Ask simple questions to identify feeling; let's assume it is anger. Delmer says, "I'd be angry too if someone took my money. Good thing we have planned carefully and \$20 won't break our bank!"

**Apply Redirection:** Because Millie previously was very engaged in her community as a volunteer, Delmer reminds his wife that it's time to head over to the hospital auxiliary coat drive and see how things are going.

Can you imagine how it would feel to be losing things that were important to you consistently? Empathy is so important when choosing and carrying out an approach.

## EXAMPLE # 3

Last month Millie did not pass her driver's test. Therefore her license was not renewed due to safety concerns. Today, Millie is adamant about leaving and continues to ask her husband all morning long, "Where are my keys?" The more often she asks, the more she paces, and her anxiety is increasing.

Strive to understand the reason for the behavior and ensure that basic needs are met. This situation seems to showcase repetition caused by frustration.

**Apply Therapeutic Fibs:** Delmer helps Millie by handing her a set of keys, however, tells her that the battery is dead, so they will not be able to go today.

**Apply Validation:** Ask simple questions to identify feeling; let's assume it is frustration. "I know the feeling, Millie this just happened to me the other day. I'll help you look!" Delmer offered.

**Apply Redirection:** "Do you think maybe I have them?" Delmer asked. "Well let's go check my pants. They are in the laundry. Maybe if we fold this load, we'll find them!"

You may need to try different approaches when one doesn't work. Also, be aware that you may need to repeat yourself and try many times throughout the course of the day before reaching success.



## EXAMPLE # 4

Delmer and Millie wake up early on Sunday mornings to follow their weekly routine: shower, breakfast, church and then out to lunch. This morning Delmer finds Millie crying in the bathroom, completely dressed while the shower is running. He hurries her, "Millie, come on we are late, get in the shower!" She doesn't move. In an attempt to make sure his wife is clean, odor-free and presentable for their day's excursion, he encourages Millie again, "No, let me help you... get in; the water is warm." She pushes him and tries to slam the bathroom door. She has barricaded herself in the bathroom and is upset.

Strive to understand the reason for the behavior and ensure that basic needs are met. This situation seems to be showcasing aggressive behavior, often stemming from being anxious or overwhelmed with the need to get clean and ready to go somewhere.

**Apply Therapeutic Fibs:** As her safety is now at risk, Delmer asks Millie to open the door because "the kids have arrived to see her."

**Apply Validation:** Ask simple questions to identify feeling; let's assume she is overwhelmed. Delmer states, "I'm so sorry, Millie. We sure do have a lot going on today, don't we? We don't have to go; how about we just stay and order some lunch in today?"

**Apply Redirection:** Delmer offers, "How about meet me in the kitchen and let's relax with a cup of coffee?"

You will have successes and failures, and it will not always be easy. However, it's a wonderful journey that brings about positive interactions and joy. Don't give up!

## EXAMPLE # 5

Delmer and Millie have just finished a homemade lunch. Millie lays down for her usual afternoon nap, while Delmer prepares to run a quick errand. After Delmer leaves, Millie awakens suddenly and is confused about her location and where her husband went. She walks out the front door looking for him and ends up walking down the street. After a few turns, one of Millie's neighbors sees her and goes outside to help.

Strive to understand the reason for the behavior and ensure that basic needs are met. This situation seems to be showcasing fear and confusion that led to wandering.

**Apply Therapeutic Fibs:** "Millie! Delmer asked us to walk back home and have some hot tea together, it's cold outside, let's go get warm!"

**Apply Validation:** Ask simple questions to identify feeling; let's assume it's scared. "Hold my hand, Millie; I know how it feels to be scared. I'm right here with you; we will be back home with Delmer soon."

**Apply Redirection:** As they are walking together back home and Millie is asking for Delmer, the neighbor reminisces about the neighborhood playground, their children and asks questions about her children.

Life Unrehearsed™ embraces flexibility as approaches must always be adapting and ever-changing to meet an individual's specific need at a specific moment. Armed with approaches and knowledge, you'll be ready to adapt and respond to each unique situation.







*the*  
**LEGACY**  
*Memory Support*

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