

How to make a memory box

If you know someone or are caring for someone who suffers from memory loss, having a memory box is a great way of allowing them to rediscover forgotten events and see memorable objects and photographs on a regular basis again.



It can also help spark conversations between them and you and the rest of the family, and is something that it may be useful to spend your time on collating whilst not being able to go out and about.

What to include

Here are some suggestions of things that could be included in the box.

1. Cards from special occasions from specific important people in your life.
This could be a birthday card from an old friend or family member, an anniversary card to discuss an event from the past, or a postcard from a place that was special.
2. Photographs
You can start by going through any old photo albums the person you care for might have and have them help you pick out key photos. It is a great activity to do together as it means spending quality time with each other and the memories may be stimulated throughout the process.
It's a good idea to have other family members help out with their old photographs too. Ask if they have any they can donate to the box that might help the person with memory loss reminisce.
If they have funny stories or memories about the person you care for, ask them to write them down so they can be read out at a later date.
3. Tickets to special events
Have you still got the ticket to a big sporting event (e.g. London 2020) or a concert or a theatre trip that was really enjoyed? Or a programme from something that was a special treat. Again a good way to start a conversation about a hobby or interest that they had.
4. Holiday mementos
This could be a fridge magnet, a guide book or map, an itinerary or any sort of souvenir that brings back thoughts of a particular holiday. What else did you do on your travels?



5. School books or reports
If you still have anything that connects with school days, this could be a mine of information about how school was for the person you care for. If nothing still exists, maybe try and find a picture of the school, or see if any old school friends have any mementos that could be included.
6. Certificates and Trophies
What were the particular interests or pastimes that the person with memory loss had? If they had been successful, this is something that can be celebrated. It may also include support of particular sporting teams – a picture of a significant victory or match that had been attended. Certificates such as Cycling Proficiency or Swimming 50m could bring back memories of events associated with going out on a bike, or swimming with friends.
7. Special clothes
You might need a bigger box for this but something like a football scarf, or ballet shoes, or the 'something blue' from a wedding day, or a child's christening dress. Again, all to remind the person of something that would make them feel happy, even if they can't remember details.
8. Letters
These could be informal or formal – the letter saying that an exam has been passed, or confirming a job, or from an old friend just having a chat.
9. Diaries (these are great to look back over when you are older!)
This is probably not a good idea if too many personal thoughts are recorded, but if they are a diary of events that had been attended from previous years, they are a good source of things to talk about with your person.
10. Photographs of larger items that you had to get rid of but wanted a memory of such as a wedding dress, your homes, cars etc).
Remember we are looking at a box that can be moved around easily – not creating a whole houseful of memories! Although if you have lived together in the same home for many years, that will come naturally.

Label items

A person with dementia or memory loss may not instantly recognise an item or photograph, so it's worth labelling everything with as much info as possible that can be relayed to the person with dementia to help them access memories. It will also help anyone else know what sort of questions to ask.

The box itself can be an old shoebox, or something sturdier, but should be easy to open.

Enjoy working out what to include and what not!

