

PICTURE THIS:

A Guide to Using Photos to Support Veterans with Dementia

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Introduction: What is This Guide?

This guide is for caregivers who support Veterans with dementia, including family members, friends, and staff in care facilities. It offers simple steps to use photos to help Veterans feel more connected and engaged; familiar pictures can bring back feelings and memories.

The guide can be used at home or in a care facility with an individual or in a group setting. It introduces photo-elicitation—a way of using pictures to recall memories and make meaningful conversations. Looking at images, such as family moments, military service, or familiar places, can help Veterans share stories and emotions.

This guide aims to:

- Encourage conversation
- Bring out comforting emotions
- Help Veterans connect past experiences to the present

Photos can help Veterans feel a sense of identity, comfort, and joy, even when words are difficult. Many of these moments can be collected into a Memory Book—a personalized photo story that you can revisit and add to over time.

Structure of the Guide

This guide has two main sections:

Part 1: Using Photos to Spark Emotions How to choose and share photos, set up sessions, and use prompts to encourage responses.

Part 2: Creating a Memory Book How to organize photos and stories into a simple, personal keepsake.



Chapter 1

How Photos Help Veterans Remember and Feel Connected

Why Photos can be Helpful for Veterans with Dementia

For Veterans with dementia, pictures can bring back memories and emotions, even when words become harder to find. Dementia often affects speech and short-term memory first, but the brain may still recognize images and recall long-term memories. In other words, while for some it can be difficult to recall day-to-day events, they may be able to remember events from the past such as their military service, friends from growing up, and family events. Sometimes, they may not be able to talk about the event, but they may remember about how it made them feel.

Choosing the Right Photos

Choose photos that feel familiar and comforting, without being overwhelming. Some photos are more effective than others at encouraging emotional responses and conversation.

Personal Photos

These are pictures that hold special meaning for the Veteran, such as:

Family events birthdays, holidays, or reunions.

Military service group photos with fellow service members, moments in uniform.

Hobbies and interests painting, gardening, climbing.

Familiar places childhood home, favorite vacation spot, or an old neighborhood.

Personal photos often bring out deeper memories, making them great for heartfelt conversations.

Common, Everyday Pictures

These are images of common scenes that aren't personal but may still feel familiar and comforting. Examples include:

Nature forests, lakes, mountains.

Daily life people cooking, walking, enjoying a park.

Objects a steaming cup of coffee, an open book, a front porch.

These types of images work well when personal ones aren't available or if personal photos bring up difficult emotions. These pictures help create a calm mood and make it easier to talk, even if the Veteran doesn't remember something specific.

Tips for Choosing Photos

- Pick clear, simple images that are easy to recognize.
- Avoid people, locations, or events that might bring up stressful or upsetting memories.
- Stay flexible—if a photo causes discomfort, offer reassurance and switch to a different photo.

The better you know the person, the easier it will be to select common, everyday photos that will feel familiar. For example, if an individual grew up in New York City, a photo of their neighborhood might include skyscrapers. On the other hand, for someone who grew up in a suburb, their home may have had a backyard.





Chapter 2

How to Use Photos to Spark Emotions and Memories

Getting Ready for a Photo Session

Dementia can make it more difficult to focus, so it's important to be in a space that helps the Veteran pay attention.

Setting Up the Space

- Choose an area without too many distractions, like, loud noises, bright lights, or frequent movement.
- Make sure seating is comfortable and that the area is well lit so that the Veteran can see the photos easily.

Picking the Right Time

- Plan the session when the Veteran is most awake and rested (usually early afternoon).
- Avoid times when they may feel tired, confused, or restless (like late afternoon or evening).

Choosing Photos That Work Best

- Select a mix of personal photos (family, military, hobbies) and common pictures (nature, daily life).
- Keep it simple; try around 5-10 photos per session to avoid overwhelming them.

Your Role

- Be patient, flexible, and ready to adjust, based on their reactions.
- Some photos may bring up strong emotions, while others may not get much response—both are okay!

Open-Ended Questions To Ask About the Photos

- Once the session begins, you can gently help the Veteran talk about each photo by asking open-ended questions. Open-ended questions encourage Veterans to express thoughts, emotions, and associations; e.g., “How does that make you feel?” These questions should be simple, non-demanding, and focused on feelings.
- Closed-ended questions, on the other hand, can be answered with simple yes/no answers, e.g., “Are you sad?” and often do not encourage meaningful answers.

For Personal Photos:

- “What do you remember about this day?”
- “Who is in this picture with you? How did you feel when you were with them?”
- “What were you doing here? Did you enjoy it?”

For Common Pictures:

- “Does this remind you of a place you’ve been?”
- “If you were in this place, how would you feel?”
- “What does this picture make you think about?”

The goal isn’t to test memory or get the “right” answer. What matters most is helping the Veteran connect emotionally. Even if their response is vague or doesn’t match the photo, the feeling behind it still matters.

Using Senses to Help Veterans Remember and Connect Through Photos

While looking at photos, talking about what the Veteran sees, hears, smells, or feels can unlock emotions and connections.

Example of Five Senses Prompts for Any Photo:

- Sight: “What colors stand out to you in this picture?”
- Sound: “What sounds do you think you would hear if you were there?”
- Smell: “Can you imagine any smells in this scene?”
- Touch: “What would it feel like to sit on that bench or walk on that grass?”
- Taste: “What do you think that tastes like?”

Example: Personal Photo – Beach Trip with Family

If showing a photo of a day at the beach, you might ask:

- “What color do you notice around the beach?”
- “What sounds from the beach do you remember hearing?”
- “What did the sunscreen smell like?”
- “How did the sand feel between your toes?”
- “What was your favorite beach snack?”

Caregiver Practice Exercise 1: Practicing Five Senses Open-Ended Questions

This activity helps practice using open-ended and five senses-based questions with photos. The goal is to improve your ability to guide Veterans through supportive conversations.

Instructions

1. Select Three Photos

- One personal photo (e.g., a family celebration, holiday, or vacation memory)
- One common picture (e.g., a dog, a cozy front porch, or a kitchen table)

2. Practice Asking Questions

- Imagine you are guiding a Veteran through a photo session.
- Ask questions to invite emotional and sensory responses.

Example for a Common Picture – City Park

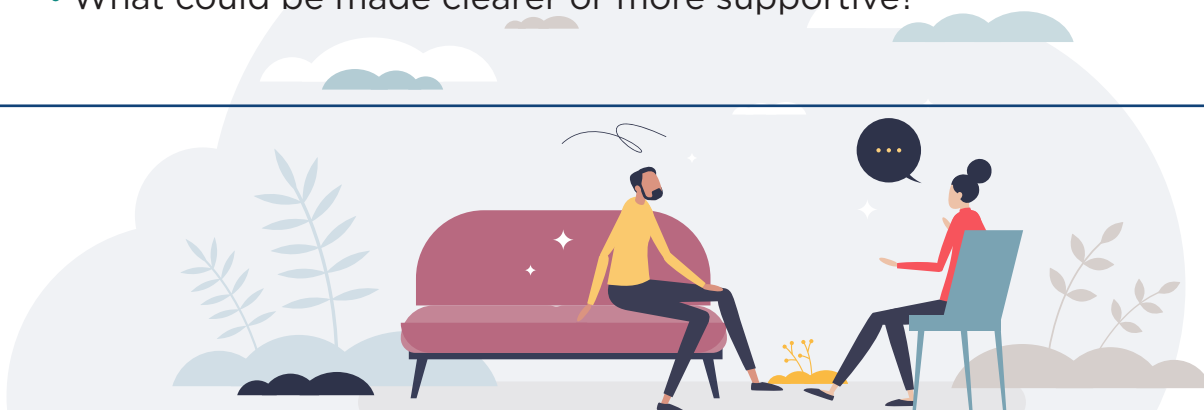
- “What specific time in your life does this remind you of?”
- “What sounds do you imagine hearing here?”
- “What season do you think it is in this picture?”

3. Role-Play with a Partner

- One person plays the Veteran; the other guides the session.
- Adjust your questions, based on the Veteran’s responses and comfort level.

4. Reflect and Revise

- After the role-play, discuss what worked well.
- Did the prompts lead to emotion, memory, or engagement?
- What could be made clearer or more supportive?





Chapter 3

Noticing and Gently Responding to Emotions

How to Respond to Emotional Reactions

Veterans with dementia may experience many emotions during photo sessions—like happiness, confusion, or even sadness. Pay attention to how Veterans express these feelings, and respond with care and support.

Letting the Veteran Know You See Their Emotions

No matter how the Veteran responds, it's important to acknowledge their feelings.

- If they express joy:
 - Let the Veteran know you see their happiness:
“I see a big smile. What do you like about the photo?”
 - Ask them to tell you more:
“Tell me more about this moment.”
- If they seem unsure or confused:
 - Offer comfort:
“That’s okay if you’re not sure. What does this photo make you think about?”
 - Avoid correcting mistakes:
If they mistake a person in the photo, instead of saying, “That’s not your sister,” say, “Tell me more about her.”
- If they become upset or withdrawn:
 - Acknowledge their feelings:
“This photo seems to make you sad. What about it makes you sad?”
 - Offer a different photo: “Let’s look at a different photo.”

Changing the Focus if the Veteran Feels Uncomfortable

Sometimes a photo may bring up strong or upsetting feelings. When this happens, you can gently shift the focus to help the Veteran feel calmer and more supported.

Tips for Changing the Focus if the Veteran Feels Uncomfortable

1. Shift Focus to a Different Part of the Photo.
 - If a Veteran is distressed by a service photo, rather than focusing on a difficult memory, shift the conversation: “This uniform looks sharp. Did you feel proud wearing it?”
2. Move to a Different Photo
 - If a certain image is overwhelming, switch to a neutral or calming photo: “Let’s take a look at this peaceful nature scene - do you enjoy being outdoors?”
3. Encourage Positive Reflection
 - If a Veteran dwells on a difficult past event, gently steer them toward a positive takeaway: “That must have been a challenging time, but it sounds like you had strong friendships. Who helped you through tough times?”

Encouraging Emotional Expression

Sometimes Veterans may feel something from a photo but they may have trouble putting it into words. You can use gentle ways to help them express what they feel.

Simple Ways to Help Veterans Share Their Feelings

- Pay Attention to Nonverbal Cues.
 - If a Veteran smiles or gestures while looking at a photo, acknowledge it: “You seem to like this picture. What do you notice about it?”
 - Allow some time for them to think. Sometimes, a short pause is better than asking another question right away.
- Use Positive and Supportive Language.
 - “You don’t have to remember everything - tell me what stands out to you.”
 - “It’s okay if this is difficult. What part feels familiar?”
- Offer Other Forms of Expression.
 - If talking is difficult, encourage the Veteran to point to something in the photo or describe it in their own way.
 - “I see you smiling, point to the part of the picture that is making you happy”
 - If they struggle to find words, provide a simple choice with a close ended question: “Does this remind you more of home or work?”

Caregiver Practice Exercise 2: Responding to A Veteran's Emotions

This exercise helps you learn how to respond to different emotions, ease distress, and encourage positive engagement.

Instructions:

1. Prepare five sample photos that could bring out different uplifting emotions (e.g., a family gathering, a military ceremony, a peaceful landscape, an old neighborhood). You can practice yourself or by role-playing with a partner.
2. Practice alone:
 - Read the practice prompts, and respond to each one out loud.
 - After you complete the practice prompts, read the example caregiver responses. Ask yourself If there are any changes you would like to make when you are doing it with your Veteran.
3. Practice with a partner:
 - One person plays the role of the Veteran.
 - The other person practices acknowledging, redirecting, and encouraging emotional responses.
 - You can switch roles after a few pictures.
4. Scenario examples:
 - Veteran laughs softly while looking at a photo of a dog sitting on the couch.
Caregiver: "That looks like a fun moment—what do you think was happening here?"
 - Veteran becomes sad or withdrawn: Pauses at a photo of a dinner table set for many people, then looks down silently.
Caregiver: "Does this remind you of someone? Would you like to tell me about this gathering, or do you want to move to another photo?"
 - Veteran expresses confusion: Doesn't recognize a familiar scene.
Caregiver: "That's okay—anything you like about this photo?"
5. Now, switch roles and provide feedback on what responses felt supportive, natural, and effective.



Chapter 4

Creating a Comfortable & Engaging Photo Experience

Designing a Photo Session Framework

A well-paced session keeps the Veteran interested while also making sure they stay relaxed and comfortable. Staying flexible is key.

Key Components of a Successful Session

Session Length:

- Sessions could last 10 to 30 minutes, allowing enough time for engagement without getting tired. Sessions can be shorter or longer, based on the Veteran's level of comfort and enjoyment.
- If you are at a facility - group sessions may last 60 minutes or more, depending on the number of individuals and their engagement.

Number of Photos:

- Allow time for each photo so the Veteran can engage without feeling rushed.
- A session may include five to ten photos that are selected based on the Veteran's preferences, interests, or past experiences.

- Example selection for a session with seven photos:
 - Three personal images (e.g., family gatherings, military service).
 - Four common images (e.g., nature scenes, daily life activities).

Pacing and Breaks:

- Allow Veterans time to talk about each photo before moving to the next.
- The Veteran may interact with some photos more than others. It is okay if the Veteran spends ten minutes on one photo and two minutes on the next.
- Notice the Veteran's behavior - if the Veteran seems tired or not interested, pause and offer a break.

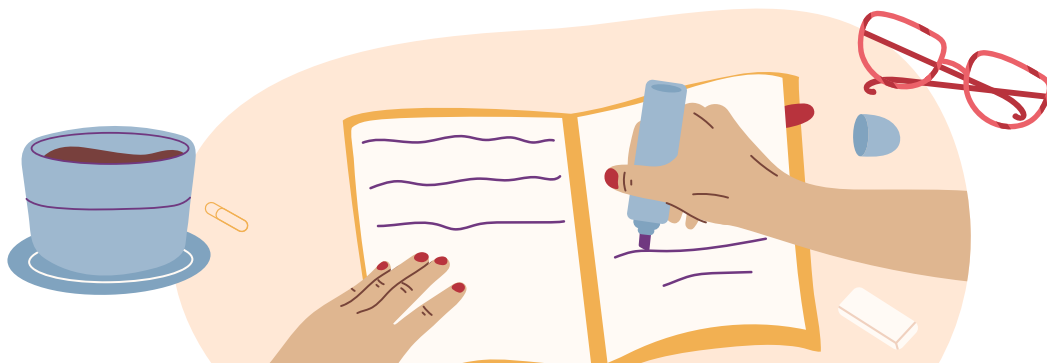
Example: After the third photo, if the Veteran appears tired, you might say:
 “How are you feeling? Let’s take a short break.”

Capturing Reactions Effectively

Jotting down notes during sessions can make it easier to build photo stories that reflect the Veteran's experiences. These notes should include both what the Veteran says and how they react with their body or emotions.

How to Capture What the Veteran Feels and Says:

- Emotional and Physical Reactions: Observe facial expressions, gestures, or how the Veteran interacts with the photo.
 - Example: If a Veteran laughs at a photo of their grandchildren,
 Record: “Laughed and seemed to have tears of joy while looking at the photo of the grandkids.”
 - Example: If a Veteran gently touches a photo of their old home,
 Record: “Ran fingers over the photo; looked like they were thinking about home.”
- Note what the Veteran says: Write down words or phrases the Veteran uses. These will help personalize Memory Books later.
- Example: If a Veteran comments about a photo of their team:
 Record: “Veteran said, ‘We had each other’s backs no matter what.’”



Caregiver Practice Exercise 3: Planning a Full Photo Session

This activity helps you practice planning a full photo session. It focuses on choosing photos thoughtfully, asking engaging questions, and managing time effectively.

Instructions

1. Choose at least ten photos with a mix of personal and ordinary images. Examples:
 - A neighborhood block party
 - Religious service
 - A peaceful nature scene
2. Write a session plan that includes:
 - The order of the photos (e.g., starting with calming images before personal ones).
 - One to two open-ended prompts per image
 - Example for a family picnic photo:
“Who is in this picture with you?”
“What were you celebrating?”
 - Time allocations for each section of the session
 - Example: For most photos, expect to spend 30 seconds to two minutes per photo.
3. Practice the session with a partner, adjusting based on feedback.
 - Test how the pacing feels—does it allow enough time for engagement?
 - Did any prompts need rewording to encourage more responses?

After the first session, future sessions can either use new photos or revisit earlier ones. You may choose five to ten new images each time or rotate through familiar ones to see if new reactions arise. Start small and gradually add images that are meaningful for the Veteran!



Chapter 5

Introduction to Creating a Memory Book

What a Memory Book Is

A Memory Book is a way to tell a story using photos with short captions or descriptions. This makes it easier for Veterans to connect with their past and share moments with others.

Types of Memory Books

1. Photo Album or Scrapbook: A printed book with handwritten captions, organized in sections.
 - Digital Slideshow or Video: Photos displayed on a screen; audio or voice recordings could be added.
2. Hybrid Formats: A combination of printed and digital formats, allows multiple ways to engage with the narrative.

Examples:

- Together as a Family: A collection of family gatherings, vacations, and holidays, with captions like “Christmas dinner with LeSean and Tiana in 1998.”
- Military Journey: A Veteran’s service history, including basic training, deployments, and reunions, with captions like “Receiving my first medal in 1972.”

The Benefits of Memory Books for Veterans with Dementia

Key Benefits

- Comfort
 - Revisiting images can bring joy, pride, nostalgia, and belonging.
 - Seeing familiar faces and places may reduce worry or confusion.
- Connection with who they are
 - Veterans with dementia often experience memory loss, Memory Books can help them reconnect with their past and their sense of self.
- Social Interaction
 - Sharing a Memory Book encourages conversation between a Veteran and their family members.

Requesting Photos from Families

Example Family Request Form

“To help us create a meaningful Memory Book for your loved one, please bring photos related to their most important life events. Examples include pictures of their military service, family gatherings, or hobbies they enjoyed. Please bring a physical or digital copy that can be used.”

Practical Considerations

- Encourage High-Quality Images - If possible, use clear, well-lit images.
- Digitization - Offer to scan photos to preserve them and prevent damage.
- Limit Overwhelming Choices - Suggest selecting 15–20 key photos to avoid overstimulation.





Chapter 6

Writing Captions for the Memory Book

Crafting Simple, Clear Captions

Captions help Veterans connect with the photos in their Memory Book. The goal is to keep the language simple and engaging, making it easier for Veterans to follow and enjoy the story.

1. Keep Captions Short and Direct.

- Veterans with dementia may not be able to follow long or complex sentences. Aim for one or two short sentences that highlight the key memory or emotion tied to the image.
- Use first person (e.g., “my” and “I”) whenever possible.

– Example:

Instead of: “This is a picture of you at a birthday party with your family celebrating together and having cake.”

Use: “My birthday party—cake, laughter, and family.”

2. Use Familiar Names, Places, and Objects.

- Personal details help reinforce identity and recall for Veterans. If an image includes a familiar person, place, or object, name it directly.

– Example:

Instead of: “A wedding.”

Use: “Dancing with my son Josh at his wedding.”

3. Incorporate Emotional or Sensory Details.

- Including a feeling, a scent, or a sound can help trigger recognition and engagement, even when memory recall is difficult.

– Example:

Instead of: “Fishing trip.”

Use: “Fishing by the neighborhood lake in the cool breeze and rippling water.”

Creating Vivid Captions

Below are more examples of captions that capture as much of the moment in the photo.

Photo Type	Limited Caption	Caption for Memory
Family Gathering	“A family dinner”	“Thanksgiving at Aunt Rose’s - Pop made his famous pie and Bob fried the turkey.”
Military Service	“Your Army days”	“Standing with my squad - Rodrigo, Sam, and me.”
Outdoor Scene	“A hike”	“Hiking with Charlie - laughing, slipping in the mud, and smelling pine trees.”
Celebration	“Birthday”	“My 50th birthday - Lisa’s coconut cake, sparklers, and the kids singing.”
Quiet Reflection	“Sitting by the lake”	“A morning at the lake - coffee in hand, watching the mist.”

Ensuring Clarity and Accessibility

Keep in mind the Veteran’s cognitive and physical needs when designing captions.

Guidelines for Clarity:

- Use large, easy-to-read text in high-contrast colors if printing captions.
- Avoid abbreviations, slang, or jargon that they do not use or recognize.
- Maintain consistent phrasing (e.g., always refer to family members by the familiar names).

If the Veteran has vision or hearing difficulties:

- For digital versions, use audio narration if reading is difficult.
- For physical copies, print in a simple font (Arial, Verdana) at least size 14.



Chapter 7

Putting Together the Memory Book

Choosing the Right Format: Physical or Digital Memory Book

Physical Memory Book

Printed books allow direct interaction and may feel more familiar or comforting to Veterans who enjoy holding something tangible. Captions can be typed, handwritten, or even added as removable cards so they're easy to update. A physical Memory Book may also be easier for a Veteran with dementia to use than an electronic device.

Additional Tips:

Leave space for family members to write in their own reflections or stories, or for the Veteran to add notes in their own handwriting if possible.

Digital Memory Book

A digital Memory Book shows photos on a screen instead of in a book. It can include sound, like voice recordings or music, which may help Veterans who have trouble reading or turning pages.

Additional Tips:

- Use PowerPoint, Google Slides, or simple slideshow software with one photo per slide and a caption in large text.
- Include optional voice recordings of family members narrating the captions.
- Avoid distracting animations or complex transitions - keep the design simple and easy to navigate.

Using Both Physical and Digital Memory Books

Some Veterans may enjoy both printed books and digital slideshows. In these cases, it can help to create a physical Memory Book and have a version on a tablet or computer.

Having both makes it easier to update the story as new photos or memories come up. This way, the Memory Book can grow and change over time.

Personalization for Emotional Engagement

Ways to Personalize a Memory Book:

1. Incorporate Handwritten Notes.

- Family members or friends can add short handwritten messages alongside captions.

Example: A note from a daughter next to a family gathering photo: “Dad, this was one of our best Thanksgiving dinners! You carved the turkey perfectly.”

2. Use Audio or Voice Recordings (For Digital Formats).

- A Veteran’s own voice or recordings from family members can help familiarity and engagement.

Example: A son records a message alongside a military service photo: “Mom, you always told me this was one of your happiest days. I love hearing your stories about this moment.”

3. Highlight Key Moments with Enlarged Photos.

- For milestone events, such as weddings, military achievements, or childhood homes, use larger images or bold captions to emphasize defining memories.

Example: “Boot camp graduation—standing proud in my uniform.”

4. Add Small Mementos (For Physical Books).

- Items like pressed flowers, old ticket stubs, or small keepsakes can add a sensory connection to the book.

Making the Memory Book Easy To Use

Every Veteran is different. Try out what works best for each person, and make changes if needed.

Once the Memory Book is complete (or in progress), it can be used in many ways. Some caregivers read it aloud with the Veteran; others simply offer the book and observe the Veteran’s reactions that day. There’s no single right way—follow their lead. Even if the same page is revisited many times, each day might bring a new story, emotion, or silence worth honoring.

Creating a Memory Book Checklist

This activity brings all the steps together. You can practice making a full Memory Book by choosing pictures, writing captions, and putting it in a format that is easy to use.

Caregiver Practice Exercise 4: Creating a Full Memory Book

Instructions:

1. Gather Photos (five to ten images).
 - Use a mix of personal and common images related to the Veteran's family, hobbies, military service, or favorite places.
2. Write Captions for Each Image.
 - Keep them short, clear, and emotionally engaging.
 - Use the Veteran's own words when possible.
3. Arrange the Photos in a Logical Order.
 - Choose between:
 - Ordering by date (childhood to later years)
 - Ordering by theme (family, hobbies, nature scenes, community events)
4. Choose a Format (Physical or Digital).
 - For a scrapbook: Print and arrange photos in a book with captions.
 - For a digital format: Create a PowerPoint, Google Slides, or video slideshow with text and optional narration.
5. Make It Easy To Use.
 - Ensure text is clear, large, and easy to read.
 - If possible, ask a partner to review it from a Veteran's perspective.



Additional Prompts

This appendix includes helpful questions to guide conversations with Veterans during photo sessions. The prompts are grouped by theme, such as family, hobbies, or military service. Each theme offers three kinds of prompts: Memory Recall, Five Senses, and Emotional Connection. Many more sample questions can be found in the full sample question appendix. The full example appendix can be downloaded for free at <https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn16/picture-this-guide.asp> or by scanning the QR code.



You can choose questions that feel natural and adjust them, based on how the Veteran responds.

Nature & Outdoors

Memory Recall

1. What is an outdoor place you remember from childhood?
2. Can you describe a park your family used to visit?
3. What outdoor games did you play when you were a child?

Five Senses

1. What sounds do you imagine in this scene?
2. How does the air feel in a place like this?
3. What plants or flowers come to mind when you see this image?

Emotional Connection

1. How does this place make you feel?
2. Whom would you want to share this place with?
3. Can you describe a moment in nature that brought you peace?

Family & Social Gatherings

Memory Recall

1. Whom in your family used to host get-togethers?
2. How did your family celebrate birthdays when you were growing up?
3. What holiday traditions do you remember most clearly?

Five Senses

1. What smells do you remember from family dinners or celebrations?
2. What sounds come to mind when you think of everyone gathering together?
3. What did the decorations look like at family events?

Emotional Connection

1. How did it feel when your whole family came together?
2. What brought you the most joy during family gatherings?
3. Who made you feel especially loved at these events?

Military Service

Memory Recall

1. What do you remember about the day you joined the military?
2. Can you describe someone who felt like a close companion during your service?
3. What stands out in your memory about your first day in uniform?

Five Senses

1. What sounds do you associate with training or being on base?
2. How did your uniform feel when you wore it each day?
3. What kinds of smells do you remember from places like the barracks or field?

Emotional Connection

1. What emotions did you feel when you first stepped into uniform?
2. What parts of your service gave you a strong sense of pride?
3. What helped you stay grounded during hard times in the military?

Hobbies & Daily Activities

Memory Recall

1. What hobby or activity brought you the most joy growing up?
2. Can you describe something you looked forward to doing each day?
3. Tell me about a project or craft you were proud to work on.

Five Senses

1. What did your tools or materials feel like in your hands?
2. Do you remember any specific smells while doing your hobby?
3. What kinds of sounds do you associate with that activity?

Emotional Connection

1. How did it feel to spend time doing something just for yourself?
2. What was the most satisfying part of the activity for you?
3. Who first introduced you to this hobby, and how did it influence you?

Travel & Favorite Places

Memory Recall

1. What's the first trip you remember taking?
2. Who was someone you enjoyed traveling with?
3. What type of transportation did you use most on your travels?

Five Senses

1. What sounds come to mind when you think about traveling?
2. How did the weather feel during one of your favorite trips?
3. What food do you remember from a place you visited?

Emotional Connection

1. How did you feel when you traveled to new places?
2. What's a place that felt comforting or familiar?
3. What trip helped you feel closer to someone you traveled with?

Childhood Memories

Memory Recall

1. What is the earliest memory you can recall?
2. What game did you enjoy playing most as a child?
3. Who was your closest friend when you were growing up?

Five Senses

1. What did your favorite childhood meal taste like?
2. What sounds do you remember from recess at school?
3. What smells bring back memories of your childhood?

Emotional Connection

1. What's a childhood memory that still brings you happiness?
2. What's something you created or accomplished that made you feel proud as a child?
3. Who made you feel safe and loved while growing up?

Special Life Events (e.g., Weddings, Birthdays, Anniversaries)

Memory Recall

1. What is the most memorable birthday you've ever had?
2. What do you remember about your wedding day or a wedding you attended?
3. What stands out about a favorite anniversary celebration?

Five Senses

1. What did the decorations look like at a celebration that meant a lot to you?
2. What sounds do you remember from that event?
3. What did your outfit feel like during that special occasion?

Emotional Connection

1. How did it feel to see everyone gathered to celebrate you?
2. What brought you joy during a wedding?
3. When did you feel especially loved or proud during a special event?

Pets & Animals

Memory Recall

1. Tell me about a pet you had when you were younger.
2. What do you remember about the first animal you cared for?
3. What was it like visiting a zoo or farm when you were a child?

Five Senses

1. What did it feel like to pet or hold an animal you loved?
2. What sounds come to mind when you think of your pet?
3. What scents do you associate with caring for an animal?

Emotional Connection

1. How did being with an animal make you feel?
2. Can you describe a time you felt especially close to a pet?
3. How did your mood change when you were around animals?

Work & Career

Memory Recall

1. Tell me about your very first job. What do you remember from your first day?
2. What was a job that brought you the most joy?
3. Who is a coworker who left a lasting impression on you?

Five Senses

1. What sounds filled your workplace during a typical day?
2. What scents do you associate with your job?
3. What did the tools you used feel like in your hands?

Emotional Connection

1. How did it feel to begin your working life?
2. What moments from your career made you feel especially fulfilled?
3. Was there someone at work who always lifted your spirits?

Music & Entertainment

Memory Recall

1. What is the first song you remember from childhood?
2. Who was a musician that had a strong influence on you?
3. Did you ever play an instrument or sing in a group?

Five Senses

1. What sounds remind you of live music performances?
2. What did it feel like to play a musical instrument?
3. What visual details do you remember from performances?

Emotional Connection

1. What song brings back a strong memory?
2. How did you feel when you heard a favorite song unexpectedly?
3. Who did you share music or stories with growing up?

Sports & Recreation

Memory Recall

1. What is the first sport you remember playing?
2. Who taught you how to play a sport you enjoyed?
3. Which athlete did you admire as a child?

Five Senses

1. What did your sports equipment feel like in your hands?
2. What sounds do you remember from games or practices?
3. What smells bring back memories of the places you played?

Emotional Connection

1. What did being part of a team mean to you?
2. What moment in sports made you feel deeply proud?
3. Who encouraged you the most in your sports or recreational life?

Food & Cooking

Memory Recall

1. What is the first meal you remember cooking from start to finish?
2. Who taught you how to cook when you were growing up?
3. What was a dish you loved eating as a child?

Five Senses

1. What smells from the kitchen do you still remember vividly?
2. What did it feel like to chop vegetables?
3. What sounds do you associate with being in the kitchen?

Emotional Connection

1. What feelings come back when you think about sharing a meal with loved ones?
2. What meal brought you the most comfort during a difficult time?
3. When did cooking help you feel calm or creative?

Holidays & Traditions

Memory Recall

1. What was your favorite holiday as a child?
2. Who in your family got the most excited about holiday celebrations?
3. What is the most memorable holiday gathering you've attended?

Five Senses

1. What holiday smells do you still remember from childhood?
2. What holiday decorations do you picture clearly in your memory?
3. What sounds or music remind you of the holidays?

Emotional Connection

1. How did holidays make you feel when you were growing up?
2. What holiday memory still fills you with happiness?
3. Who made the holidays feel meaningful in your life?

Friendships & Relationships

Memory Recall

1. Who was your very first best friend, and how did you meet?
2. What is a favorite memory you have with a close friend?
3. What kinds of things did you do regularly with your group of friends?

Five Senses

1. What did the sound of your friends laughing together feel like?
2. What do you remember about the places you and your friends spent time in?
3. What smells remind you of time spent with friends?

Emotional Connection

1. How did spending time with your friends make you feel?
2. What is a memory of a friend that always makes you smile?
3. What is a moment when you realized how important someone was to you?

Vehicles & Transportation

Memory Recall

1. What was the first car you ever drove?
2. How did you learn to drive?
3. What stands out about your first road trip?

Five Senses

1. What did it sound like when you started the engine of your first car?
2. What do you remember from holding the steering wheel?
3. What smells come to mind when you think of driving a car?

Emotional Connection

1. How did you feel the first time you got your license or learned to drive?
2. What is a trip that you would love to take again?
3. Who made traveling especially meaningful for you?

Home & Neighborhood

Memory Recall

1. What did your childhood home look like?
2. What do you remember about the first home you lived in as an adult?
3. Who were your closest neighbors, and what stood out about them?

Five Senses

1. What textures do you remember from the walls in your home?
2. What smells come to mind when you think about home?
3. What sounds do you associate with your home environment?

Emotional Connection

1. How did your home make you feel when you were growing up?
2. What is one thing you miss most about a place you used to live?
3. Who made your home feel special?

School & Education

Memory Recall

1. What do you remember about your first day of school?
2. Who was a teacher you admired?
3. What subject did you enjoy most in school?

Five Senses

1. What did the desks or chalkboards feel like?
2. What sounds do you remember from your school days?
3. What smells come to mind from your school cafeteria?

Emotional Connection

1. How did it feel to learn something new?
2. What is a moment from school that made you proud?
3. Who encouraged you during your education?

Technology & Innovations

Memory Recall

1. What was the first piece of technology you remember using?
2. What do you remember about getting your first television or computer?
3. What invention amazed you when it first came out?

Five Senses

1. What did the buttons or switches on older devices feel like?
2. What sounds do you associate with older machines or tools?
3. What did early electronics or devices look like?

Emotional Connection

1. How did you feel the first time you used new technology?
2. What is a time when technology helped you feel connected?
3. Who helped you learn how to use a new device?

Family & Ancestry

Memory Recall

1. Who in your family told the best stories about the past?
2. What do you remember about family gatherings or reunions?
3. What traditions or customs did your family practice?

Five Senses

1. What smells remind you of home life?
2. What did your childhood home look like?
3. What sounds do you associate with your family?

Emotional Connection

1. How did your family make you feel supported or loved?
2. What is a memory of a family member that brings you joy?
3. Who in your family left a lasting impression on you?



Veterans Crisis Line

Phone: 988, then press 1

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