

Using Digital Playlists for Nostalgia and Respite

Using Playlists

Music is said to have a unique effect on the brain that can trigger emotions and memories, boosts brain function and also provides respite and entertainment.

Age Connects Torfaen recently delivered a Soundtrack of Your Life project that used playlists as a resource to support people living with dementia. In this project they created digital playlists on Spotify and YouTube. The playlists included songs that were meaningful and reminded the person of moments or periods of their life.

Emma Wooten from Age Connects Torfaen said that this had been a really impactful and cost-effective project. The great results include:

- A 60% drop in use of sedative drugs
- Enabling a connection between the person being supported and their loved ones
- Helping people to recall significant memories
- Respite for the people supported, and comfort for their families

Step 1 - Find the right music

You can start to build your playlist through conversations with the person you're supporting, their family and friends.

You might want to ask questions such as:

- Are there any songs or artists that remind you of your childhood?
- Can you think of any favourite bands, singers or shows?
- Could songs from the war conjure any memories?
- Are there any favourite Christmas songs?
- Are there any wedding songs that could help?

[Playlist for Life](#) is a charity that specialises in harnessing the power of music to connect people, and to help those living with dementia and those who care for them. Their [create the soundtrack of your life](#) guide contains ideas for conversation starters that can help you to build a collection of songs that gives that flashback feeling whenever they are heard.

There are a wide range of pre-made playlists, including traditional Polish songs, Bollywood hits, football chants, musical theatre tunes and lots more. You could use these playlists as a starting point and they might spark other musical memories.

When building a playlist it's important to watch out for red flags, and avoid songs that trigger unpleasant or unwanted feelings.

Step 2 - Create your playlist

The way you create your playlist will depend on the tools and resources you and the person you're supporting have available. For example, you might use Spotify but you'll need an account, and the free account has adverts. You could create a CD or upload songs to an MP3 player, but you may need to pay to download the music in the first place/.

It's also important to remember that the person you're supporting will need equipment to play the music independently. This might include:

- A device, eg mobile phone, tablet, laptop, MP3 player or CD player
- Speakers or headphones

Step 3 - Introduce the playlist and encourage them to use it

At first, it's best to use the playlists as a shared activity of about 30 minutes. Start a conversation around the songs "How did you used to dance to this song?" or "This was one of your wedding songs. Can you tell me about your wedding dress?".

Introduce the playlists as often as you can. Support the person to use their device independently if possible so that they can listen to the playlist when they want. Encourage them to listen to the playlist before doing a difficult task or in case they need a moment to relax when they are out and about. It's also a great way for family and friends to engage with a loved one who lives with dementia.

Final Thoughts

Once you have the right devices and software, making playlists is a really simple and effective way to engage with people with dementia, or any older person who might benefit from a little nostalgia. Read more about the science behind this work at [Playlists for Life](#).

About Age Connects Torfaen

Emma Wooten and the team at [Age Connects Torfaen](#) support older people in their community in lots of ways, including home visits, information and advice, clubs and activities and a community cafe.

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