

Caring for the Aging

Participant Guide



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You will learn about the physical, mental & emotional changes that come with aging, how to recognize when parents and seniors need help, how to talk to them about their changing needs, making the home “Senior Friendly”, and choosing a retirement home!

Recognizing When Seniors Need Help

- Difficulty walking, unsteady standing
- Persistent fatigue
- Bruises on body from falling
- Personality changes, irritability, sudden mood swings
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor judgment
- Memory loss, confusion, forgetfulness
- Confusion, sadness, anxiety
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Reluctance to socialize
- Wearing the same outfit over and over again
- Poor grooming/ hygiene, body odor, bad breath
- Soiled clothing
- Unsafe home conditions
- Disorderly home that is usually tidy
- Jars and bottles left open
- Burnt pots and pans
- Spoiled/ outdated food in the fridge
- Messy laundry littering the floor
- Items cluttering the tables and countertop
- Unopened mail, past due bills, mishandled finances
- Dangerous driving

Talking to Them about Their Needs

- **Don't start the conversation by telling them that you think there is a problem;** ask them if they think that there is a problem. How do they feel? What are some of their challenges?
- **Make sure your senior is in a good mood when you approach them.** Are they well rested, well fed, and in good spirits?
- **Be aware of your body language.** Don't stand over them like a parent to a child; sit and talk with them eye-to-eye.
- **Talk with them slowly, loudly and clearly.** Let them know when you are changing to another point in the discussion. Try not to overwhelm them with too many points, or too many negative points all at once.
- **Ask your senior's opinion about how best to handle their situation.**

- **Be respectful of their desires**, including desire to maintain dignity, privacy and independence.
- When your senior's opinion about the situation is different from yours, **don't automatically contradict them**. Try to be empathetic of their point of view.
- **Talk to them about how assistance can help them have a higher quality of life**. Many strategies will actually allow them to have more independence, such as modifications to the home or getting a walker or "Senior Scooter"
- **Offer them help, but don't force or demand that they accept it**.
- In the conversation, (if it suits your personality), **try offering your opinion or suggestions in a light-hearted way with some humour**, rather than a somber approach that might upset them. See these potential steps as positive, natural and rewarding for them.
- **Stop (for now) if you feel that they are getting** upset or reacting defensively, and approach the subject another day.

Senior Care Services

- **In-home assistance**. A care provider or a registered nurse can either visit on a regular basis to check in on them, ensures that they are taking their medicine, or goes as far as bathing them and helping them get dressed.
- **"Meals-on-wheels"**. A service which delivers hot and nutritious food to the doorstep of senior citizens on a budget. For seniors and their families, it is peace of mind that their nutrition, health and safety are being tended to.
- **"Lifeline" communication service**. Communication services like Lifeline allow the senior to carry a one-button pager on a wristband or necklace strap that alerts a monitoring station to send emergency help with the press of a button, in the case of fall or injury. www.lifelinesys.com
- **Senior community groups**. Your local community center or YMCA will likely offer a range of social activities that are relevant and relatable to your senior. Check out what activities might be interesting to them. Look to see what some of their friends or acquaintances enjoy doing for leisure.
- **Financial Services**. Many banks and financial services offer arrangements to support senior citizens, drawing on the equity of their estate. Reverse mortgages allow seniors to receive monthly payments that will help cover their cost of living. Consult your local financial institutions for details.
- **Community Care Access Centres (CCAC)**. CCAC helps co-ordinate services for seniors, people with disabilities and people who need health care services in the community to help them live independently in their own homes for as long as possible. Check the yellow pages for the one located nearest to you.

- **Websites.** These days, senior citizens have discovered and embraced the internet as an amazing way to stay in touch, learn and have fun! These “silver surfers” enjoy email, chatting, reading and even dating through the internet! Check out the following site as an example of what is available:
www.laterlife.com

Choosing a Retirement Home

- **Clarify your senior’s needs.** Do they require some medical assistance, help getting dressed, assistance bathing, or 24-7 supervision due to dementia or extreme illness? Also consider personal services like hairdressing, TV, private phone, and laundry.
- **Research your options.** The internet is a valuable source to begin your search. As well, you can check the local yellow pages. Talk with friends, family, colleagues about their experiences. Ask local hospitals and Registered Nurses which homes they would recommend.
- **Take the formal tour.** When you have identified a home that seems to meet your needs, arrange for an opportunity to visit the site with your senior. Be prepared with a list of questions that are important to you. During the tour, observe the general morale of the seniors at the facility.
- **Ask to see the facility’s most recent survey report.** Accredited institutions will be visited by regulatory boards to ensure that they are maintaining high standards of care. Request to see the results of the most recent evaluation. Pay attention to the credentials and training of the staff, reports of complaints or compliments, the hygiene and cleanliness of the facility, ratio of staff to residents, and turnover rate of the staff.
- **Drop in unannounced at different times.** Drop by and check out the cafeteria during meal times; are the seniors being taken care of? Is it orderly or chaotic? Is the food warm, appetizing and nutritious? Ask some of the seniors about their opinion of the care, and you may receive some very candid answers.
- **Can you afford it?** The cost of long-term care can be heavy. Insurance and government support may very well be required to pay the bills. Options like a reverse-mortgage on the senior’s home to generate monthly cash flow may need to be considered. Consult a financial advisor to understand your options.
- **Does your senior like it?** Ultimately, their feelings need to be considered. Perhaps arranging for a trial period of a few days or weeks, to allow them the opportunity to try it out without final commitment, might be what they need to sell themselves on it.

Helping Them Enjoy Senior Life

- **Make and keep friends.** Search the internet for local seniors' groups, or if your senior is in a nursing home check its social calendar. Ballroom dancing lessons at the community center, or a bridge club can be an enjoyable way of spending time with friends their own age.
- **Contact long lost or childhood friends.** Your senior may speak with warmth about old friends that they haven't seen since childhood or high school. Check the internet on sites like "Classmates" to try to help them reconnect with childhood friends.
- **Have email and pen pals.** The internet has truly opened up the possibilities for long distance communication. Email, real-time text-chat, web-chat, or make VOIP calls (Voice Over Internet Protocol telephone calls) all eliminate most long distance charges. Relationships hindered by distance and physical mobility can be rekindled and nurtured. Jokes can be shared amongst distribution lists, and your senior can search for internet communities and chat sites that cater specifically to their age and interests.
- **Reminisce about old times.** Watching old family films and flipping through old family albums can bring back warm memories. Encourage them to share stories about the photographs in the album, even if you've heard the story a dozen times; where the shot was taken, who was there, what they were doing.
- **Volunteer.** Seniors, like everyone else, can derive great satisfaction through giving back to people. And, they have the time to do it! Volunteer at local schools, community centers or hospitals. Perhaps it is energizing to be in an environment with young children, or to offer service at a library or animal shelter.
- **Visit with little kids.** Children help to keep us young at heart because they smile, laugh easily, have a playful nature, offer hugs, are highly energetic, have vivid imaginations and can offer unconditional love. Seniors can spend time at a grade school or with grandchildren.
- **Go for a walk.** If your senior is mobile, encourage them to go out and get some fresh air and sunshine. Passing through their neighborhood will get the blood flowing, allow them to say hello and interact with neighbors and take a break from sitting quietly at home.
- **Arts and crafts.** If your senior enjoys working with their hands and is capable and comfortable, they may have developed hobbies like cross stitch, painting or knitting clothing. Creating something can bring great pleasure, and can be done from the comfort of their living room or bedroom. Make sure they have ample supplies of whatever materials they need to engage in their favorite craft.

- **Make a daily 'To Do' List.** When seniors have a list of things to do each day, it gives them purpose and the satisfaction of accomplishment. The list can be as simple as making the bed, taking medicine and 7am and 7 pm, having a bath, or having tea with friends. This can extend life!
- **Keep their mind active!** Seniors can derive intellectual pleasure by engaging their mind on subjects that are interesting and relevant to them. Encourage them to read, finish the crossword puzzle, or learn something new. Taking a course on something of interest at the community center or night school will challenge and sharpen their mind and memory.

TIPS on Making your Home Senior-Friendly

Bathroom

- **Are bathtubs and showers equipped with non-skid mats, abrasive strips, or surfaces that are not slippery?** Apply textured strips or appliqués on the floors of tubs and showers. Use non-skid mats or appliqués in the tub and shower, and on the bathroom floor. Add a bath or shower seat if your loved one is frail or unstable when standing.
- **Do bathtubs, showers, and toilet areas each have at least one (preferably two) grab bars?** Check existing bars for strength and stability, and repair if necessary. Attach grab bars, through the tile, to structural supports in the wall, or install bars specifically designed to attach to the sides of the bathtub. If you are not sure how it is done, get someone who is qualified to assist you. An over-the-toilet commode or raised toilet seat can make it easier for older people to get on and off the toilet.
- **Is the water temperature 120 degrees or lower?** Lower the setting on the hot water heater to "Low" or 120 degrees. If you are unfamiliar with the controls of the water heater, ask a qualified person to adjust it for you. If the hot water system is controlled by the landlord, ask the landlord to consider lowering the setting.
- **Is a light switch located near the entrance to the bathroom?** Install a night light. Inexpensive lights that plug into outlets are available. *This is especially important if your loved one makes frequent trips to the bathroom at night.* Consider replacing the existing switch with a "glow switch" that can be seen in the dark.
- **Are small electrical appliances such as hair dryers, shavers, curling irons, etc., unplugged when not in use?** Even an appliance that is not turned on, such as a hairdryer, can be potentially hazardous if it is left plugged in. If it falls into water in a sink or bathtub while plugged in, it could cause a lethal shock. Unplug all small

appliances when not in use. Never reach into water to retrieve an appliance that has fallen in without being sure the appliance is unplugged.

Kitchen

- **Consider re-arranging the kitchen contents so that the pots and pans, canned goods and staples items are in easy-to-reach positions.** Consider lowering shelving or adding pull-out storage units under counters.
- **Are towels, curtains, and other things that might catch fire located away from the range?** Store flammable and combustible items away from range and oven. Remove any towels hanging on oven handles. If towels hang close to a burner, change the location of the towel rack. If necessary, shorten or remove curtains which could brush against heat sources.
- **Are all extension cords and appliance cords located away from the sink or range areas?** Move cords and appliances away from sink areas and hot surfaces. Move appliances closer to wall outlets or to different outlets so extension cords won't be needed. If extension cords must be used, install wiring guides so that cords will not hang near sink, range, or working areas. Consider adding new outlets for convenience and safety; ask an electrician to install outlets equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) to protect against electric shock. A GFCI is a shock-protection device that will detect electrical fault and shut off electricity before serious injury or death occurs.
- **Does the kitchen have a step stool that is stable and in good repair?** If your loved one doesn't have a step stool, consider buying one. Choose one with a handrail they can hold onto while standing on the top step. Before climbing on any step stool, make sure it is fully opened and stable. Tighten screws and braces on the step stool. Discard step stools with broken parts.
- **Have any of the foods in the refrigerator or freezer become outdated?** Periodically go through everything in the refrigerator and freezer and throw away all outdated foods.

Steps, Stairs and Walkways

- **Are they in good repair with smooth, safe surfaces?** Have a qualified person make any necessary repairs.
- **Are stairs well lighted?** Use the maximum wattage bulb allowed by the light fixture. (If you do not know the correct wattage, use a bulb no larger than 60 watts.) Reduce glare by using frosted bulbs, indirect lighting, shades or globes on light fixtures, or partially closing blinds and curtains.
- **Are light switches located at both the top and bottom of the stairs?** Install night lights at nearby outlets. Consider installing switches at the top and bottom of the

stairs. Do the steps allow secure footing? Try to avoid wearing only socks or smooth-soled shoes or slippers when using stairs. Make certain the carpet is firmly attached to the steps all along the stairs. Consider refinishing or replacing worn treads, or replacing worn carpeting. Paint outside steps with paint that has a rough texture, or use abrasive strips.

- **Are steps even and of the same size and height?** Mark any steps that are especially narrow or have risers that are higher or lower than the others. Be especially careful of these steps when using the stairs. Are the coverings on the steps in good condition: repair coverings, remove coverings, replace coverings.
- **Can they clearly see the edges of the steps?** Paint the edges of outdoor steps white so they are visible at night. Add extra lighting. If you plan to carpet the stairs, avoid deep pile carpeting or patterned or dark colored carpeting that can make it difficult to see the edges of the steps clearly.
- **Are handrails on both sides of the stairway and outside steps, and are they firmly attached?** Have a qualified person add any needed handrails and/or make any necessary repairs. Make certain to allow enough space between the wall and the handrails so they can be firmly grasped.
- **Is anything stored on the stairway, even temporarily?** Remove all objects from the stairway.

Rugs

- **Are all small rugs and runners slip-resistant?** Remove rugs and runners that tend to slide. Apply double-faced adhesive carpet tape or rubber matting to the backs of rugs and runners. Purchase rugs with slip-resistant backing. Check rugs and mats periodically to see if backing needs to be replaced. Place rubber matting under rugs. (Rubber matting that can be cut to size is usually available at your local hardware store.) Purchase new rugs with slip-resistant backing

Telephones/ Emergencies

- **Can your loved one hear the telephone ring**, or do they have trouble hearing a caller when using the telephone? Turn up the ringer volume on the telephone, or go to a hardware store or Radio Shack to get a separate ringer with an adjustable volume control. Consider adding a light that flashes when someone is calling. Purchase a telephone that includes an adjustable volume control so that a caller's voice can be heard more clearly.
- **Are emergency numbers posted on or near the telephone?** Write the numbers in large print and tape them to each phone in the home, or place them near each phone where they can be seen easily.

- **Does your loved one live alone and are they frail or unstable when they walk?** Subscribe to an emergency medical response system from a company such as Lifeline, Lifealert, etc. Your loved one will receive an emergency call button to wear as a necklace pendant, on their wrist, or clipped to their belt. If they fall and can't get up, they can press the call button; that will automatically activate an emergency call for help over their telephone. Call your local hospital to find out who they recommend for this service.
- **Does your loved one have an emergency exit plan** and an alternate emergency exit plan in case of a fire? Develop an emergency exit plan. If more than one person lives in the house, choose a meeting place outside the home so they can be sure that everyone escaped. Practice the plan from time to time to make sure everyone is capable of escape quickly and safely.

Doorbell

- **Can your loved one hear the doorbell?** Consider an alternative to a doorbell such as a flashing light indicating someone is at the door.

Space Heaters

- **Are heaters which come with a 3-prong plug being used in a 3-hole outlet or with a properly attached adapter?** Never defeat the grounding feature. If you do not have a 3-hole outlet, use an adapter to connect the heater's 3-prong plug. Make sure the adapter ground wire or tab is attached to the outlet.
- **Are small stoves and heaters placed where they can not be knocked over, and away from furnishings and flammable materials, such as curtains or rugs?** Move heaters away from passageways and flammable materials such as curtains, rugs, furniture, etc.

Medications

- **Are all medicines stored in the containers that they came in and are they clearly marked?** Be sure that all containers are clearly marked with the contents, doctor's instructions, expiration date, and patient's name. Dispose of outdated medicines properly. Request non-child-resistant caps from the pharmacist if your loved one cannot open child-resistant caps. Use a pill dispenser if they take several medications daily. Filling a pillbox may take a few extra moments once a week but reduces the chance of errors. The pillbox will also help indicate if they are taking the medications as prescribed. Using a weekly dispenser will help remind you to refill prescriptions before the last pill is gone.

Bedrooms

- **Are lamps or light switches within reach of each bed?** Rearrange furniture closer to switches or move lamps closer to beds. Install night lights. Are ash trays, smoking materials or other heat sources (heaters, hot plates, teapots, etc.) located away from beds or bedding? Remove sources of heat or flame from areas around beds. Make sure they don't smoke in bed.
- **Is an electric blanket being used correctly?** Use electric blankets according to the manufacturer's instructions. Don't allow anything on top of the blanket while it is in use. (This includes other blankets or comforters, even pets sleeping on top of the blanket.) Don't set electric blankets so high that they could burn someone who falls asleep while they are on.
- **Is a working flashlight close to your bed in case electrical power goes out?** Check the flashlight to see if the batteries are still good.
- **Is a telephone close to your loved one's bed?**
- **Do they ever go to sleep with a heating pad which is turned on?**

Adapted from www.aging-parents-and-senior-care.com

Access your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)

For confidential support and access to resources, contact your EFAP using WorkHealthLife.com or the LifeWorks app.

Contact your leader or HR to learn how to access your organization's EFAP.

Your Feedback Is Important To Us!

*You will be asked to complete an **online survey** following the session.*

*Please complete **as soon as possible** to help improve and plan future training.*

*Your responses are completely **anonymous**.*

Thank you.



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