

What You Need to Know About Social and Emotional Changes in Older Adults



Everyone has basic emotional needs, but do you know the list of emotional needs your elderly family members or elderly care recipient require? What are the emotional needs of the elderly? Most people think of the physical changes and disabilities associated with aging, but emotional changes in old age are common. Aging can be a very frustrating process in general, but older adults have unique social, psychological, and emotional needs that need a particular attention to. Typically, aging is not a slow and steady decline. Some adults may experience an accident or a sudden chronic diagnosis that immediately or progressively impacts their daily lives. A once healthy, thriving individual could become bedridden and rely heavily on caregivers or other family members for assistance, resulting in a deep depressive state and low self-worth.

The psychological, physical, emotional, and social needs of older adults should all be taken into consideration for the best possible care. We will discuss some unique needs of the older adult and how you as a caregiver can best understand and assist them.

The Social Needs of Elderly Adults

Social isolation and loneliness result in serious health conditions in any individual, especially prevalent in older adults. Here are two social needs that a caregiver can perform for the elderly that can offset and even prevent isolation and loneliness.

1. Meaningful Relationships

Older adults require meaningful relationships and experiences to meet the emotional and social needs. Most people tend to have casual acquaintances in their younger years, but with time and age comes depth in such relationships and stronger bond and a form of support and belonging. Older adults don't need your pity; they want intentionality and meaningful relationship and conversations. They want to know that you genuinely care about them, not just enforcing a personal sense of guilt and pity for them or their situation.

Companionship care can be an all-embracing resource for older adults who need a professional caregiver and a friend. At its principal, caregiving is a interpersonal commitment to care for others with sincerity, purpose and respect. A meaningful relationship is built between the caregivers and older adult or care recipient through dedicated, personalized, and unique personal care that is related to them as an individual and meets their unique needs.

2. Regular Social Interactions

Cognitive decline may cause unintentional social withdrawal and apathy in an individual, making them more prone to isolation, loneliness and consequently lead to depression. However, social interactions play a positive role in preventing cognitive decline and emotional decline. During COVID-19, social interactions became even more limited than before for older adults and many suffered loneliness. Without meaningful relationships, an individual sense of worth declines and they may feel useless and worthless, further negatively impacting their sense of self and self-esteem.

At the very least, call the aging family members or care recipients to check-in. As a caregiver, your companionship may be the only source of social interaction they receive and it means more to them than you know. If you are unsure how to start a conversation, here are a few ideas to get the conversation going:

- Ask them for a recap of their day.

- Ask them how they're feeling (mentally, emotionally, etc).
- Ask them if they've invested time into a new or existing hobby.
- Ask about their childhood and what life was like back then (helps to workout their memory muscles).

In general, ask open-ended questions to prompt a long response and discussion. When an individual is encouraging to openly communicate and discuss something they are passionate about, it increases their sense of self-worth and confidence, making them feel a sense of belonging. The best thing you can do in a conversation with an older adult is listen. They want to know that their thoughts and input are appreciated by you.

The Psychological Needs of the Elderly

Mental health issues among older adults are common. More than 2 million Americans aged 65 and older live with some form of depression. Although depression is more common in younger adults, the onset of depression in older adults can result due to various causes, such as: a chronic illness diagnosis, changes in physical and cognitive limitations, bereavement, changes in family dynamic, loss and grief over past life, and loss of social contact.

Research suggests that late-life depression and Alzheimer's disease may correlate. As the family member or a caregiver of an older adult, provide mental stimulation when you can:

- Play memory games, puzzles, crosswords and word searches.
- Offer a space for them to express their genuine thoughts and feelings.
- Give elderly individual a scrapbook and ask if they can recall positive memories.
- Reminiscing about past life or going through an album and reflecting on good memories.

Asking the older adult to repeat something they just said or reminisce about past experiences will help strengthen the cognitive function and bring forth a more

positive attitude and impact on the individual and the caregiver. It will build a stronger bond in the relationship, builds good rapport and makes the older adult feel a sense of belonging.

The Emotional Needs of the Elderly

Emotional changes in the elderly are a mixed bag of highs and lows. Some older adults report feeling happier daily compared to younger adults, while others experience geriatric depression.

Studies have shown that older women who report low levels of emotional support are twice as likely to die as those with high levels of emotional support. Sometimes we can take emotional support for granted when we have a large community around us. Meaningful relationships are key in establishing good rapport and healthy relationship to enhance emotional support of an individual and a sense of belonging.

However, some aging adults don't have a large community providing them with this significant emotional support. Affirm the values of older adult care recipient every chance you get, and do your best to empathize with them. Try to put yourself in their shoes and understand what they are feeling. Be compassionate, patient and understanding.

There are many emotional needs of an individual, especially the elderly, but let's look at the top 3 emotional needs and discuss them in more depth and their importance.

Top 3 Emotional Needs of the Elderly

As an individual ages, they may feel useless, hopeless, lonely, angry, or even in denial about their overall wellness and abilities or limitations. Living alone with minimal social interactions may further exacerbate such negative feelings. Here are the top 3 emotional needs of an individual, especially vital to note in an older adult: **Safety and Security, Connection and Autonomy.**

Safety & Security

Older adults have a greater fear of falling and injuring self than robbery, financial stress, or other health issues. Providing a safe, secure environment for older adults is crucial to their holistic wellbeing. Ensure the rooms are well lit, no clutter, no loose furniture or on wheels that can easily slip and slide around, and no loose rugs or wires that could result in tripping and falling are few of the examples how you can ensure safety and security of the environment. Regularly assess your environment for fall risks such as clutter, loose objects or slippery floors are of major concern. Other vital security checks include ensuring the doors are locked, especially at night or having a home security system in place for further security and safety.

Connection

Humans require connection and a feeling of belonging, no matter their age. Feeling disconnected emotionally and physically from people can be detrimental to one's health, impact a sense of worth and self-image, depleting own sense of belonging or "usefulness" further leading to isolation and consequently depression. Due to COVID-19, more than half of older adults nearly at 56% reported feeling isolated with occasional or rare social interaction with others. This feeling of loneliness negatively affects entire wellbeing of an individual, especially the older adult. Technology use was vital and is still important to connect with the elderly adult, a family member or a friend who are both far and near, to keep in contact and ensure proper wellness is promoted to meet each unique emotional needs.

Autonomy

Seniors have been independent adults their whole lives, they have been a part of their community and contributed greatly their entire life to the wellness of the community and loved once. Growing old and relying on others can be a very hard transition for them to accept as it may make them feel as a burden to others. In-home caregivers are a great option for older adults who want to retain independence but need regular care, light assistance around the house or assistance with errands or other needs to ensure

safety and promote independence as much as possible. Additionally, in-home caregivers are great companions for the older adult to help meet their emotional needs and feel a sense of belonging. An in-home caregiver are essential in their role as they help fulfills the emotional needs of elderly people and physical needs, such as meal preparation, bathing, dressing, companionship, and much more.

In-home Care for Older Parents

The social and emotional development in older age can be difficult for family members to understand, let alone manage. As the adult child and caregiver of an elderly parent, you don't have to do it all alone. You don't need to step into yet another role in the midst of a busy life, personal and family life. We're here to serve you at European Services. At European Services, we serve with compassion and empathy to each client under our care, understanding and care for them as our own loved one. As the primary caregiver of your loved ones, we understand it can be overwhelming and exhausting work and you may need a "break" so to speak as well to ensure you are taking care of self too. Leave the caregiving up to us, so you can remain the son or daughter of your aging parent. We provide Respite services, where while you are away a trained professional will be there with your loved one to assist and ensure they are safe and taken care of, just like we would take care of our own loved one.