



HAPPY HOLIDAYS? MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME WITH AGING LOVED ONES

by Becky Schwantes-An, MSW, MA, LMSW



Though we hope this holiday season is filled with joy and laughter for all families, as social workers we are all too aware that any time with an aging loved one is an important opportunity to observe how they are functioning and feeling. Since many families are separated by distance or the busyness of life, Holiday get-togethers can be an important and unique time to assess how your loved one is doing and what they may need to have better quality of

life in their later years. Here are just a few important issues to look for when visiting with your aging loved one.

Weight Loss or Weight Gain is one of the quickest identifiers of a health problem. Weight loss caused by physical or mental issues could be related to heart failure, depression, dementia or memory loss, thyroid problems, vision problems, loss of taste, or even some types of cancer. A change in weight can also be related to social and physical functioning such as improper nutrition due to difficulties preparing meals, getting to the grocery store, loss of energy to eat, or an inability to clean up after preparing a meal. Older adults can also gain weight due to inactivity and lack

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How We Can Help: Geriatric Care Management

Pathways for Aging provides case management that includes:

- Customized information** about community resources to meet the needs of your loved one
- Peace of mind** if you are separated by geography or a trip
- Someone to act as your eyes and ears** and troubleshoot a problem before it becomes a crisis
- A supportive advocate** with life-altering decisions impacting quality-of-life, such as medical & housing decisions
- Assistance** in managing paperwork, insurance claims and benefits
- Professional help** with strained family relationships & negotiating difficult decisions

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS? TIME WITH AGING LOVED ONES *(continued from page 1)*

of exercise. The National Institute on Aging has created a user friendly website aimed specifically at helping older adults stay active, healthy and strong: <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/exerciseforolderadults/toc.html>. We urge you to arrange for your loved one to visit their primary care doctor if you notice any changes in weight or eating habits. If the problem is not medical, a social worker could help by providing counseling for depression or anxiety. Social workers are also able to monitor your loved one and arrange for services through Geriatric Care Management.

Preventing Falls Difficulty with balance in later life can be caused by health problems or safety issues in the home. Certain medications can cause older adults to feel drowsy and cause them to fall when, for example, trying to get to the bathroom in the middle of the night. Limping, favoring of one side, or “furniture surfing” where a person grabs onto chairs, tables and railings as they walk through rooms to “steady” themselves can also be caused by joint or muscle pain. Some people have dealt with chronic pain for years and do not notice it getting worse—they just take more over-the-counter or prescription pain medicine without addressing the causes of the pain. Trouble seeing can also cause people to furniture surf and fall when an item that they cannot see gets in their way. Not only can burners on the stove be left on when people have vision problems, but older adults can fall in the kitchen or bathroom and seriously hurt themselves on the hard floors, sharp corners, and other objects often left lying around in these rooms. Balance issues must be taken very seriously because preventing a fall can literally mean preventing an early death. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), “one out of three adults age 65 and older falls each year. Among those age 65 and older, falls are the leading cause of injury death.” See <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html> for more information on falls and fall prevention.

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Questions to Ask about an Aging Loved One

- 1. *Is their current living environment the safest and most appropriate for them?***
 Yes No Unsure
- 2. *Is your loved one regularly sad, angry, anxious or fearful?***
 Yes No Unsure
- 3. *Are you sure they are taking their medications and nutrition as directed?***
 Yes No Unsure
- 4. *Have your family dynamics become more strained as your loved one continues to age?***
 Yes No Unsure
- 5. *Could your relative benefit from someone helping to sort through decisions and issues of concern?***
 Yes No Unsure

If you answered “Yes” to any of these questions, please contact our office. You or your loved one may benefit from our weekly in-home counseling program (typically covered by traditional Medicare) or our more intensive Geriatric Care Management program that provides short-term or on-going support.

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Driving Safety If your older loved one is still driving, it is crucial that you constantly assess their ability to keep doing so safely. It is important that you regularly ride with them as they drive and observe their ability to follow traffic laws, get where they need to go without getting lost, and can see any safety hazards for themselves or for others sharing the road. If for safety reasons you feel it is time that your aging loved one needs to stop driving, we encourage you to consult AARP's webpage on driving: www.aarp.org/weneedtotalk. In our experience as social workers, we have often found it best to have a primary care physician take the keys away if the older adult is unwilling to stop driving. This loss of independence may lead to feelings of anger and depression. Therefore, it is important that other arrangements be made for your older loved one to leave their home regularly for more than just doctor's appointments and grocery shopping. St. Louis has many transportation options for seniors, and the Alzheimer's Association maintains a large list of these resources at www.alz.org/stl/documents/stlreporttransportation.pdf

Mental Health and Emotional Issues may go undetected over the holidays because older adults often try to mask their depression or anxiety. There are several physical and emotional symptoms that may present themselves if you watch for them and spend some focused time talking with your older loved one about their daily activities and feelings about specific aspects of life. Some of the most common symptoms of depression and anxiety include persistent feelings of sadness, anger or emptiness, lack of patience, decreased energy and fatigue, dramatic mood swings, memory problems or confusion, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, insomnia or oversleeping, restlessness or irritability, being scared or frightened over many things, frequently being on edge or 'grouchy,' crying over small things or for no apparent reason, or they may feel detached and emotionally numb towards other people. Sometimes when older adults experience rapid memory loss, confusion or change in mood, they may have a urinary track infection that needs to be treated with antibiotics. It is important that older adults are regularly monitored by their primary care physician to make sure these symptoms are not being caused by a reaction to medication or a new physical illness. If they are experiencing depression or anxiety, weekly sessions with a clinical social worker is often beneficial. The National Alliance on Mental Illness—New Hampshire Chapter, has compiled an online guidebook for helping families and their aging loved ones prevent, cope with, and treat mental health issues in older adults. Their Guidebook can be found at www.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/Home4/Home_Page_Spotlights/Spotlight_1/Guidebook.pdf



Becky Schwantes-An, MSW, MA, LMSW began working with Pathways for Aging in January 2009 as a therapist and geriatric care manager. Becky previously worked as a case manager with older adults, in community advocacy and education programs for elders, with refugee resettlement, and with social services in a county court and jail.



PATHWAYS FOR AGING WELCOMES SHARON OLSON GILMORE, MSW, LCSW

Sharon Olson Gilmore, MSW, LCSW joined Pathways for Aging as a therapist in November 2010 after 23 years experience as a professional social worker. Sharon worked for 13 years as a therapist at a very renowned agency in St. Louis, Kids in the Middle, helping kids and their families cope with the transitions of separation, divorce and remarriage. Sharon also has experience in the field of substance abuse, working in several hospital chemical dependency treatment programs for both adolescents and adults. Sharon also worked at the former Incarnate Word Hospital, one of the only Geriatric hospitals in the St. Louis community in the Department of Psychiatry. Sharon has consulted with patients in nursing homes who had psychiatric diagnoses. Sharon received her Masters in Social Work degree from Washington University in St. Louis and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the State of Missouri. Visit pathwaysforaging.com/about for more information about our staff.

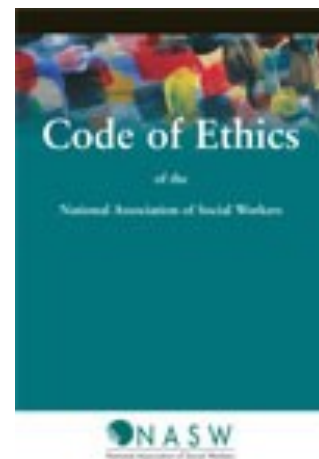


TIDBITS ABOUT OUR SOCIAL WORKERS: WHAT MAKES US

Social Workers are trained in Biopsychosocial Theory which seeks to meet every client in their individual situation and use techniques that fit the individual person. Social Workers are trained to look at clients' overall situation from a variety of angles to determine the most effective interventions. Social Workers also utilize other community resources and frequently refer to them as a way of aiding the client work toward his or her goals.

All social workers receive extensive training in ethics and are required to adhere to the [National Association of Social Work's Code of Ethics](http://www.nasw.org). There are six ethical principles that guide all social workers' practice and are rooted in social work's core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence.

- 1) Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.
 - 2) Social workers challenge social injustice
 - 3) Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.
 - 4) Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.
 - 5) Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner
 - 6) Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.
- To learn more about the social work profession, visit: www.helpstartshere.org*





RECENT POSTS ON THE PATHWAYS FOR AGING FACEBOOK PAGE

THREE R'S OF LONGEVITY Approaching 100, Esther Tuttle speaks of three critical attributes: resolution, resourcefulness and resilience.

Coping With People Who Are "Difficult" - Relationship Problems; Tools to Build and Maintain a Healthy Relationships Do you ever find yourself asking why there has to be so many difficult people in the world? Why can't they just stop being difficult? Ever get together with a group of friends or family and complain about difficult people?

FACING DEATH How far would you go to sustain the life of someone you love, or your own? When the moment comes, and you're confronted with the prospect of "pulling the plug," do you know how you'll respond? In *Facing Death*, FRONTLINE takes a closer measure of today's complicated end-of-life decisions through this video and comprehensive website.

BILLIE JEAN DANCING SENIOR CITIZENS
The Awesome Threesome: 70+ year old Leisure World residents honor Michael Jackson by performing a dance in Seal Beach, California.

Read more on the [Pathways for Aging Facebook Page](#).

PATHWAYS FOR AGING ON FACEBOOK!

Join Pathways for Aging on the internet's largest social networking site! The Pathways for Aging page provides information on mental health, support for older adults, caregiver needs, links to articles and stories, and a discussion board about issues important to you.

[Click here to join now:](#)



How We Can Help: Therapy & Counseling

Many **older adults** find the changes and losses they experience difficult to cope with, especially if they transition to new living arrangements. Therapists serve as supportive listeners who work with individuals to navigate their new roles and the emotions that come with these transitions. Counseling addresses a variety of concerns and symptoms, always respecting the unique needs of each person.

Therapists help **caregivers** work through their own emotions so that they have the energy and ability to care for their loved ones. **Private Insurance or Employee Benefit Programs may help cover the cost of caregiver counseling.**

We also provide all services on site in the client's home or facility so transportation is never a problem. **For those with Medicare and a Part B supplement, therapy often has no cost or a small co-payment.** Pathways for Aging is able to bill Medicare and other insurance providers directly.



COMMUNITY EDUCATION PRESENTATIONS



Pathways for Aging has historically provided therapy, counseling, and geriatric care management for older adults, yet we also offer preventative programs to promote emotional health and positive aging. Our social workers offer presentations on the following topics for older adults, caregivers, agency staff, family members, or a combination of audiences on site at your location.

- **What is Happening to my Parents? Tips & Advice for Adult Children** on identifying specific issues, communication techniques, support on “what to do next,” and tools for how to care for your aging loved ones
- **Age as an Asset** debunks stereotypes and myths about aging, especially in the media, and helps older adults recognize their wisdom and experience as the gift of later adulthood
- **Improving Emotional Well-Being & Mental Health** discusses why having good mental health helps people lead better lives and age positively. This presentation offers strategies to avoid and cope with stress, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.
- **Caregiver Issues** discusses how to avoid severe stress and burnout when you are taking care of others by examining the issues you should be aware of when caring for an older loved one. We discuss what you can do for them as a caregiver, and what you should be concerned about for yourself to avoid burnout.
- **Spirituality in Later Life** discusses how faith, spirituality, and/or meditative practices can be used to promote healthy aging and positive mental health.
- **Using Reminiscence & Life Review** provides tools for reflecting on our lives, including struggles and successes, to help older adults live well and excel in their lives today.
- **Strengthening your Mother-Daughter Bond** No relationship seems to be more complex or challenged than that of an aging Mother and her Adult Daughter. This presentation offers tips for stress management, creating support systems, and practical techniques for developing insight, empathy and respect for each other.
- **End-of-Life Decision-Making & Medical Ethics** gives an overview of bioethics and how it relates to end of life decision making, making difficult decisions such as withholding and withdrawing treatment, quality of life concerns, euthanasia, assessing decisional capacity, surrogate decision making, and the role of religion and culture.



We are also able to create presentation topics specifically for your organization. Contact us to discuss dates and topics by calling 314-361-3530 or emailing: contactus@pathwaysforaging.com.



WEBSITE TIP OF THE MONTH

Long-Term Care Ombudsman

<http://www.dhss.mo.gov/Ombudsman/>

Missouri's ombudsman program consists of volunteers serving residents of nursing homes and residential care facilities to provide support and assistance with any problems or complaints. The program seeks to diminish the sense of isolation experienced by residents, especially those without family. The ombudsman can assist the resident in achieving a sense of self determination. Ombudsmen strive to reinforce the importance of resident rights. While residents are provided information regarding their rights upon admission, the ombudsman is there as the resident adjusts to the facility to reiterate those rights and offer assistance in exercising those rights.



Become an Ombudsman! Sometimes nursing home residents need someone to help them speak up for their rights. The Long Term Care Ombudsman trains volunteers to advocate for these residents, providing a vital link to quality nursing home care. Ombudsman volunteer qualifications include: liking older people, have time available, be 21 years of age, have good listening and communication skills, be objective, sensitive, diplomatic, reliable, willing to complete required minimum 18 hours of training; and, have transportation Click to apply: [Volunteer On-line](#).

Do you know a Resident who needs an Ombudsman? Call (800) 309-3282 or email LTCOmbudsman@dhss.mo.gov for assistance.

PLEASE CONTACT US

Call or [email](#) us today if you, a friend, family member, neighbor, or client needs help with an older adult. We can also help caregivers with decision-making, support, ideas or professional counseling. Visit our [website](#) to [learn more about all of our social workers](#), detailed information about our services and to read about current issues of aging, mental health, and therapy on our [Pathways for Aging Blog](#).

THE SOCIAL WORKERS OF PATHWAYS FOR AGING

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