

WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH THE ELDERLY



Elderlies that NuLife Engages With :

- Individuals aged 60 years and above
- Common presenting problems: Residing alone in rental flat; loneliness; depression; struggling to pay for essentials; inability to afford medical bills; loss of mobility; difficulties completing daily tasks; loss of ability to work.
- Types of engagement services:
 - Counselling
 - Casework
 - Outreach
 - Repair & refurbishment services
 - Robinhood (e.g. provision of adult diapers)
 - Befriending

Understanding Elderly behaviors

➤ AGGRESSION

Examples

- Hitting
- Biting
- Scratching
- Pushing
- Shouting / scolding

Some Possible Causes :

- Cognitive disorders (e.g. dementia, Alzheimer's)
- Physical discomfort due to illness
- Side-effects of medicine
- Poor adaptability to aging
- Frustration due to increased dependency on others
- Hunger or thirst

What You Can Do

- Remain empathetic and calm.
- Ensure that the elderly has not skipped any medication.
- Ensure they have their meals and are well-hydrated.
- A safe, predictable and structured environment also helps in reducing anxiety and increasing overall well-being.



➤ PARANOIA, DELUSION AND HALLUCINATION

Examples

- Accusing others of theft.
- Believing others are out to harm them.
- Seeing or hearing things that are not there.

Some Possible Causes :

- Pre-existing mental health conditions
- Cognitive disorders (*e.g. dementia, Alzheimer's*)
- Social isolation
- Untreated urinary tract infections

What You Can Do

It is important to reduce their stress and anxiety in such situations. Do not try to convince them that their experiences are not real this may cause further escalation.

➤ HOARDING

Examples

- Holding onto items regardless of their value.
- Distress at thought or suggestion of parting with the items.
- Excessive clutter in flat that blocks passageways and makes living space inaccessible or unusable.

Some Possible Causes :

- Coping mechanism to alleviate anxiety and have some sense of control
- Social isolation
- Believing that someone is stealing their items when they have actually forgotten where they kept their items.

What You Can Do

- Try creating a memory box with them and encourage them to select valuable things that they would like to store in this box.
- This will help them to filter meaningful things and also help them to cope with the fear of memory loss.

➤ OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Examples

- Repeated locking and unlocking of doors due to fear of being robbed.
- Extreme orderliness.

Some Possible Causes :

- Cognitive disorders (*e.g. dementia, Alzheimer's*)

What You Can Do

Guided relaxation technique, deep breathing exercises, gentle yoga, light walking and stretching can help in reducing their anxiety. Talk to them in a non-judgemental and empathetic manner. Recommend them to visit a mental health professional if you feel necessary.

➤ REPETITIVE BEHAVIOUR

Examples

- Engaging in the same task again and again.
- Repeatedly asking the same question.
- Discussing the same topic over and over.

Some Possible Causes :

- Cognitive disorders (*e.g. dementia, Alzheimer's*)

What You Can Do

It is important to communicate with them compassionately and to validate their feeling, this will reduce their feeling of frustration.

It can be helpful to identify triggers for such behaviour and try to eliminate them. Consulting with a counsellor can be beneficial as well.

Communicating with Elderlies

You may have to speak slowly, clearly and a bit louder.

- As we grow older, our sense of hearing, vision, taste, smell and touch decreases in efficiency.
- This could make it difficult for elders to keep up with their immediate environment.
- Speaking clearly, slowly, loudly and in short sentences so that it is easy may make it easier for them to follow, comprehend and communicate back with us.

Sit face-to-face with the elderly.

- Some seniors may experience loss of hearing and poor eye sight, thus it is important to sit face-to-face with them so that they can hear and see us clearly.
- Sitting at a right distance will ensure they can read our lips if necessary. Sitting in close proximity also helps the elderly to feel connected and focus better on the conversation.
- Maintaining eye contact will also reduce distractions for them.



If the senior is wheelchair bound, do not stand and talk.

- Make sure to sit at their eye level while speaking to them.

Be a good listener

- Seniors have lived a long life and they often suffer from loss of their loved ones, difficulty coping with their illness, poor cognition, feeling of loneliness, isolation, fear of rejection.
- Thus, being a good listener is essential when interacting with seniors to make them feel heard and valued.
- Let them lead the conversations, if they are comfortable to do so.

Find a way to connect with them.

- Most seniors love spending time with others. An effective way to spend quality time together is by engaging in an activity.
- You could play games, cook a meal together, share family photos, learn a dialect or teach them how to use a smart phone.
- Do something that is fun, engaging, aligned to their interest and has an element of challenge.



If possible, accompany them for outings or medical appointments.

- Many seniors suffer from loneliness and social isolation. Your companionship is invaluable especially during times when they are most vulnerable.
- Many seniors, especially those with mobility constraints, tend to feel stressed going for medical appointments.
- A helping hand, reassuring words and making time to accompany them for such visits can make a huge difference to their mental health.

Exercise patience and compassion.

- It is easy to lose patience and feel frustrated while working with seniors since you may encounter various challenges with them such as forgetfulness, aggression, repetitive behaviour etc. The best way to generate patience and compassion is by exercising empathy.
- Indulge in retrospection. "It must not be easy...," or "It must be hard...." Because, "She's being so difficult. It must not be easy to accept the passing of her husband." "He does everything so slowly. It must be hard to deal with dementia every day.

Ask for their opinion instead of order deciding what to do for them.

- Seniors often lose respect from others due to their failing health, declining cognition and increased dependency.
- However, just like any of us, they want to be respected and valued for their life-long contributions. We can make them feel valued and loved by validating their feelings.
- A simple way to do it is by giving them the option to choose rather than dictating what is right for them.

Engage in open conversations instead of making assumptions.

- If you see them hoarding things or missing things, complaining about things being stolen, do not assume that they are again being difficult.
- Talk to them gently and validate their feeling.
- Do not try to prove them wrong. Instead focus on relieving their anxiety.

