

SENIOR RESOURCES

guide

December 2, 2021

COMMUNICATION
Involves More Than Just
TALKING

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SENIOR RESOURCES *guide*

It has been a long, challenging year and a half as we all learned to stay six feet apart, don masks and isolate as best as possible. Now restaurants, movies and friends' homes are opening up again. Invitations to visit family, even if that means getting on an airplane, are resuming. Even requests for in-person doctors' visits are granted.

While that all sounds great, it can also be somewhat scary. It has been awhile since one-on-one, in-person conversations and meetings were the norm. Communicating via Zoom never truly felt right, but at least there was that. This Senior Resources Guide, which is written by The Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington, hopefully will help you deal with the challenges of communicating in person, attending card games and meetings and generally getting out and about with little trepidation. In other words, it is time to start returning to the world.

This guide is designed to offer tips on how best to return to your idea of an active lifestyle and also how others – including younger family members and doctors – should communicate effectively with senior adults who just may be a bit out of practice.

LAUGHTER

While you may have grown comfortable staying within the walls of your home or apartment while spending time reading, watching television and perhaps working on a new hobby, studies show that engaging with others is healthy and can improve your mood. That is especially

true when you share a laugh with others.

"For older adults, laughter truly is the best medicine," according to Charles Benjamin, executive director of Harrogate, a senior living community in New Jersey. In a blog on that community's website, Benjamin noted, "As we age, we naturally become more susceptible to health ailments, and it's more important than ever for us to care

for our minds, bodies and souls in order to live the best possible lives."

According to his blog, laughter improves cardiovascular health and can reduce blood pressure. Deep belly laughs draw more oxygen into our bodies, enabling our hearts to work more efficiently. Sure, you shared a chuckle or two while on the telephone or on Zoom, but the truth is positive interaction is just plain better when sharing with someone in person. Distractions are fewer, and it is not nearly so easy to multitask, thereby disengaging from time to time.

Laughter releases endorphins, which help to ease any pains you may be experiencing. A good giggle can reduce stress and anxiety, which can be so harmful to our bodies. And, believe it or not, laughing helps improve core strength by exercising the abdominal muscles and diaphragm.

Also, laughing – as well as other forms of personal interactions – improves relationships by bringing people closer. Bonding usually results with more frequent get-togethers. That should make it easier to agree to another outing, and another. Suggest meeting for a cup of coffee, a walk around the neighborhood or a nearby park and when you are more comfortable being in groups, try a movie or dinner at a restaurant.

Of course, you can get a great laugh watching a short cat video on Facebook or a funny television show or movie so don't stop checking out your favorite videos.

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**“FOR OLDER ADULTS,
LAUGHTER TRULY IS THE
BEST MEDICINE.”**

CHARLES BENJAMIN



“CONVERSATION IS A MEETING OF MINDS WITH DIFFERENT MEMORIES AND HABITS. WHEN MINDS MEET, THEY DON’T JUST EXCHANGE FACTS: THEY TRANSFORM THEM, RESHAPE THEM, DRAW DIFFERENT IMPLICATIONS FROM THEM, ENGAGE IN NEW TRAINS OF THOUGHT. CONVERSATION DOESN’T JUST RESHUFFLE THE CARDS: IT CREATES NEW CARDS.”

CONVERSATION

Just a laid-back chat can ease tensions and start up a relationship. Anglo-Irish poet David Whyte once said, “A real conversation always contains an invitation. You are inviting another person to reveal herself or himself to you, to tell you who they are or what they want.”

Author Theodore Zeldin noted, “Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don’t just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn’t just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards.”

Don’t worry about running out of things to talk about just because you haven’t been with a friend in almost two years. Conversations usually work their way toward that one topic that interests you both. This is true for people of all ages.

For those who haven’t seen their grandparents or great-grandparents since the world first shut down due to the pandemic, don’t worry. The love and caring are all still there. Give them your full attention and take heed of problems. They may have trouble hearing, something that didn’t occur the last time you visited. Speak louder, come closer and pay attention to their reactions to make sure

they are following what you say.

Look around at your surroundings. Perhaps there is too much background noise. Just find a quieter setting. Perhaps there are too many distractions. Seek out an easier place for you both to relax and chat. There are more tips on communicating with those whose vision and hearing aren’t what they used to be later on in this guide.

Need some suggestions on what to first talk about? Don’t ask about their health. Chances are your senior friend

or relative is experiencing new aches and pains, as you probably are as well, but who wants to talk about their last doctor’s visit? That, of course, is necessary if your loved one is experiencing medical issues. This guide will talk about dealing with that later on.

Ask a senior adult about something from their past. If you are a new mother, maybe your loved one will have some helpful tips and recall the ups and downs of early parenting. And if you happen to be with a grandparent, they can fill you in on how wonderful you were!

Ask them what they liked to do as a child, back when there were not any smart phones and televisions only had a couple of channels. How has their neighborhood changed? What was school like? What about making dinner without a microwave or staying in touch with friends without

THEODORE ZELDIN

Facebook? What were considered the healthy – and not so healthy – foods back then?

You don't have to deal with the past. Talk about their day-to-day activities. What movies have they seen lately on television; what books are they reading; what music makes them want to get up and dance? Use the answers as a starting off point. If you have read the same book or seen the same show, then you have a great opportunity to connect. If not, talk about what you have been watching or reading and let them know if you think they will enjoy it. Ask what books they have read that they believe should be read by the next generation.

If you are visiting someone in their own setting, look around the room. Do you see a painting that attracts you? Ask them how they came to purchase it and why they like it. Do you see an award or framed certificate? Learn all the details. Chances are it is something to be proud of and worthy of discussion.

Think about what you are doing now and see how they handled it. If you are attending college, and they did as well, tell them about your experiences. Chances are you will get great insight into how things have changed and, in some cases, how things haven't changed at all.

If you are a family member, surely there are a few topics you've always wondered about. Ask away, but be mindful that they have the right to not want to answer. Observe their body language. Ask your grandparents to show you their wedding album or early family photos. That should bring back some great memories and stories untold for many years. Or how about asking what they got paid at their first job? How did they know

they wanted to marry their future spouse?

If you are speaking with a neighbor or someone you don't know that well, you can still discuss many of these topics without getting too personal. It would still be interesting to see their wedding album and learn about their early life. How about asking what movie star they had a crush on when they were young? That could lead to a lengthy and revealing discussion.

Asking questions that can be answered in just a word or two will not lead to a relaxed, spontaneous conversation. Be prepared to draw them out of their shell, if necessary. It's probably been a long time since they had an in-person conversation that didn't involve a repair person or mail deliverer.

Experts suggest when talking with senior adults that you don't change subjects too quickly. Strive to keep them engaged. Avoid topics that may not be comfortable for them. However, there comes a time when those issues must be dealt with, like telling them it's time to give up driving or move out of their home and into assisted living or an apartment with no stairs.

No matter what your age is, no one wants to be on the receiving end of unwanted advice, especially if it comes from their own child. It is important to start with support and encouragement, and make sure you are talking directly to them.

If there are several family members together, don't gang up. Sure, you all have your aging parent's best interest at heart, but don't come across like you have already discussed this and come up with one solution, and that decision is final.

Always remember how hard these decisions can be for the person involved. Leaving a home packed with so many memories isn't something to do lightly or because someone else says it is time. Taking away the car keys may be the right thing to do and worth pursuing, but keep in mind you are taking away that person's independence and ability to get around. Uber may be a logical choice, but remember they may never have tried it and don't even have a smart phone to order up a ride.

There are paid services, like GoGoGrandparent, that will connect people without smart phones to rides. These services are designed for people who want to continue living independently but no longer drive or only drive during daylight hours.

During these delicate conversations, be sure and listen to what they have to say and what their concerns are. You may have heard it before or think you know what your loved ones are feeling, but it is important for them to know you are listening and taking their feelings into account. Also, you may be surprised at some of their responses.

Pick your battles. Don't expect them to agree to stop driving and move out of their home all in one day. You will probably have to bring them around gradually to what you already see as the inevitability. Some day you may be in their shoes. Treat them as you would like to be treated.

Perhaps, rather than push your aging parents toward moving out of their home, it might be best to start with suggesting they bring in a caregiver to help with cleaning, shopping or personal bathing and medical care. That way they can remain in their comfort zone, but be safer and give you and your siblings peace of mind.

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HERE'S HOW TO SHOW YOU CARE

- Always speak politely and respectfully
- Address people as they prefer, using their first name or calling them Mr. or Mrs. Smith, for instance
- Make eye contact and utilize active listening skills
- Be present in the situation and think only about what is being discussed
- Be aware of your body language and nonverbal cues
- Show cultural awareness even if this means you must do some homework beforehand
- If the conversation turns tense, remain calm.

ADVICE FOR CAREGIVERS

Caregivers, also, need many of the listening and conversational skills discussed earlier. If they have been hired as a home companion or an aide, it is important to build a relationship first so that the person in their care trusts them. Don't be discouraged if this doesn't happen quickly. Often, their job includes communicating with both their charge and that person's family.

All American Home Care in Pennsylvania posted communication tips for caregivers when they speak with family members, calling good communication an integral part of their client's care. Building trust enables family members to open up and will enable caregivers to be more successful.

Just be yourself while maintaining a boundary between you and the patient and family members, the company recommends. Small talk, as long as no one appears uncomfortable, usually is a good way to start. Also, it is crucial to be honest at all times. If you as a caregiver do not know an answer, say that and let them know you will ask the proper person and get back with a response. If they are asking about medical information, it is best to suggest they deal with the person's doctor directly. Let them know as a

caregiver, you are there to listen and address their concerns but not give medical updates or suggestions.

Also, when speaking about medical issues, remember the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protects patients' privacy. Be careful not to violate this law. However, if you have the patient's permission, generally you can discuss medical information.

While showing compassion is "a no-brainer," it states in the article, caregivers should establish ways to demonstrate they do care about the well-being of the person they have entrusted to your care.

Home Care Pulse, a company dedicated to helping home health care workers, also lists ways to communicate with clients. It is important not to interrupt, which often only angers the client. Be an excellent listener and provide clues that show you are listening. Saying things like "I see" or paraphrasing what you just heard enables caregivers to stay engaged and strengthen the conversation.

Ask open-ended question that are understandable. Simple yes or no replies don't move a conversation along.

Home Care Pulse suggests that sensitivity



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is key. Establish a way to explain medical and other issues without talking down or being too technical. Some medical terms may seem simple to understand, but remember you have been trained in the field and your client's condition is new and frightening to them.

Don't be afraid of being human, according to Home Care Pulse. You may still be professional while talking to clients about their day, their emotions, their concerns. Keep in mind that not everyone is the same. Some clients may just want their issues and concerns validated. Others want someone merely to listen to them. Still others want to vent and complain. It is your job to figure that out and act accordingly.

Remember, "Communication is more than talking; it's understanding. By communicating effectively, you're telling your clients that you care about them, and want to make them happy. You're telling them you appreciate their business, and ultimately that they are worth the effort. And by implementing these points company-wide, you will help improve communication, increasing satisfaction among both clients and employees," according to Home Care Pulse.

According to Annika Thor, author of "A Faraway Island," "A conversation is so much more than words: a conversation is eyes, smiles, the silences between words."

Sometimes, the minute clients meet their caregivers, they begin to open up. They may be starved for company. Generally, someone who likes to talk is more open to having a helper. This is not always the case.

Some senior adults are reluctant to take to a new person. Others are angry about their condition and how much their life has changed and look at caregivers as forcing reality on them. Still others have lived alone for a while and would rather just read or watch television.

EasyLiving, a home care and care management agency in Florida, notes that reluctant clients are often people whose family members or medical practitioners have convinced them they need a caregiver. They may tell you they don't need any help. Obviously, as a caregiver, you can't force someone to accept their presence. But it is important to at least try and let them know you are there to assist.

It is important to start a new relationship in a positive way. Be cheerful, understanding and willing to adapt to the client's emotions and thoughts. Humor works if they are open to it. If possible, talk to family members first about what to expect and how best to deal with their

loved one. Ask them what their loved ones enjoy doing and talking about.

Letting clients understand that your relationship is temporary and can be terminated if the two of you aren't a good fit may ease their mind a bit. Try taking them on a small outing first or help them with a specific task that they acknowledge they need assistance with, like housekeeping or cooking, and work from there.

Find common ground, suggests EasyLiving. Home care is very personalized and does not come with a one-size-fits-all formula.

Even if the person strongly denies the need for assistance, he or she may agree it would be just fine to have someone to take a walk with or fix up their flower beds together. If you are hired to drive someone to an appointment, use the one-on-one car time to learn about each other. Any little tidbits grow toward opening doors and creating bonds and long-lasting relationships.

But don't push too hard. Instead think of how you might feel if the situation was reversed and you were the one with a stranger walking into your home. Sometimes time is the best answer, so don't get discouraged.

Some clients are downright angry, resentful of your very presence, and not agreeable to any suggestions you try. They may lash out at you, accuse you of all kinds of "crimes," or just complain about their life. Don't take it personally, they are going through some extremely difficult life adjustments.

EasyLiving suggests trying redirection or deflection techniques. Don't ignore their emotions but try and have a positive conversation on something that is not controversial or that reminds them of their failings. If you can, put on soothing music or watch a funny movie together. Do some breathing exercises together.

Continually monitor and modify your reactions. Don't allow yourself to become stressed. If you are a family member and meet with this anger, remember it is not about you. If the behavior is out of character, it is probably a good time to check with a doctor about possible medical conditions, including dementia and paranoia, that may be at the root of this new anger.

Depression in the elderly often comes with agitation, restlessness and even cognitive problems. It may seem like someone is just plain irritable when it could rise to depression that could be helped through treatment.

If the person you are caring for is a family member, a spouse or a parent, sometimes the best of intentions can turn bad. Family dynamics, past hurts and slights, differing



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financial situations and willingness to take on painful responsibilities all linger when sensitive subjects are discussed. According to an article in AgingCare.com, regardless of whether family members are close or there is friction between relatives, there are some basic rules of communication to follow to make conversations productive.

Do not give advice unless asked, AgingCare suggests. If you are dealing with your parents, they are used to being the ones with all the knowledge. It can be quite difficult to accept life-changing advice from a child, even if that child is already 50 or 60 years old. The parent-child role reversal is often very difficult for a parent to accept. Keep that in mind, and should it become necessary, bring in a neutral party to assist. Your role may be limited to encouragement and support, combined with a gentle push toward a particular decision that may need to be made. That includes such extremes as taking away the car keys or dealing with a move to an assisted living facility.

Regardless of the circumstances or topic, it is important to really listen to what your family member or close friend is saying. Try not to interrupt, even when they pause with pregnant silences. They may be merely working out what they want to say or making sure they understood the question. Listening goes both ways. It should be obvious if people are listening to you or already have their mind made up.

Remember, just because someone you love disagrees

with you, it doesn't mean they aren't listening. No matter how close you are, people don't agree all the time, AgingCare points out. Respect everyone's opinion and don't merely disregard their comments because you disagree.

Speak clearly. Some senior adults would rather guess what you are saying than admit they are losing their hearing. While it may be necessary to speak louder, never shout. It is much better to enunciate clearly and speak slowly. Don't be condescending. Don't talk down to anyone, even if that person suffers from dementia.

Think about where you want to hold that important, in-depth conversation. If it is in your living room, make sure the television and radio are turned off and there aren't any other conversations going on nearby. Face the people you are speaking with and stay aware of their body motions. If they are stiff with hands folded, they probably will not be receptive to what you are saying. Also, if they have reduced hearing, they may find it easier to lip read. If you are talking with several family members together, place the person for whom the conversation is dedicated toward the middle of the room so that no one is too far from them.

Consider what your relative may be thinking as soon as sensitive conversations arise. Are they dreaming about their spouse who is no longer there for support and comfort? Are they remembering a good friend they no longer see because they have moved away or passed

away? Or are they viewing themselves as young and not ready for what you are saying? Unless necessary, don't make them feel like you are taking away their power to make decisions and plan their own future. Let them know they are the most important person in the conversation.

Don't tackle too many conversations at once. There are so many challenges as seniors age – mobility limitations, decreased stamina, new aches and pains, medical issues, loneliness, memory lapses. AgingCare suggests you pick your battles and not tackle everything at once. The most important issues revolve around their health and wellbeing. Suggesting they toss out their throw rugs and buy safety handles in the bathroom is an early discussion that may pave the way so that one day soon you can discuss moving from a large home to a small apartment or a senior living facility, or even a room in the home of a relative.

Don't overwhelm them to the point of depression. Generally, they know they are aging. They are aware what is happening to their friends and people in their card games or programs at the senior center. It takes a while to accept what is generally the inevitable. Your job may merely be to guide them down that path without adding roadblocks.

Remember, conversations shouldn't just be you talking. Ask questions. Find out how your relatives or friends believe they are faring. Throw in a positive, happy memory or a good joke. Don't make everything so serious. Don't beat yourself up if the first conversation did not go so

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well. It is a long process for some, especially those who are in denial of their situation. Try your best to understand where they are coming from.

If they continue to resist assistance, it may help to know that you are not alone. According to a study by researchers at Penn State University, 77 percent of adult children believe their parents are stubborn when it comes to taking advice or accepting help.

Sometimes communication can be improved simply by taking into consideration frailties that often come with aging. When asking them to read a document, use large print. Always make sure they understand what they have read before moving on.

According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 71 percent of adults who are at least 60 years of age had difficulty using print materials, 80 percent had difficulty using documents like forms and charts and 68 percent had trouble interpreting numbers and doing calculations.

Experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggested that caregivers always consider the age, literacy skills, cognitive and physical functioning, level of comfort and competency with technology and cultural and ethnic differences. Be aware of how complex and new your message is and act accordingly.

Remember to focus on the main issues and make sure the people under your care understand the big picture

before getting into the minutia, according to the CDC. And don't be afraid to repeat or use memory aids to reinforce the message.

According to the CDC, about two out of three adults with vision problems are at least 65 years of age. When dealing with clients and loved ones with visual challenges, use black text on a white background for best contrast. Adjust font size so it is easier to read, often 16 or 18 point type works well. Provide extra spacing between lines. People with low vision may have difficulty finding the beginning of the next line. Avoid using paper with a glossy finish as it can cause glare.

Make sure lighting in the room is adequate with minimal glare. If necessary, consider alternatives to writing, such as recording what is important. When possible, use as little text as possible.

According to the CDC, hearing loss affects one out of three people who are older than 60 and about half of those older than 85 years of age. For those with hearing challenges, be sure to limit background noise and speak clearly and with more volume. Do not chew gum or eat while you are speaking. Always look directly toward the person. Face-to-face talks are much easier for those with hearing loss. Also, keep your hands away from your face while speaking just in case the person needs to read your lips.

MEDICALLY SPEAKING

According to the National Institute on Aging, effective doctor-patient communication is an important part of the healing process. When the



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communication works well, patients are more likely to adhere to their treatment plan and have better results. In fact, interpersonal communication skills are so crucial that they are a core competency identified by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education and the American Board of Medical Specialties.

Effective communication prevents medical errors, leads to improved health outcomes, strengthens patient-provider relationships and makes the most use of short-term interactions, according to the NIA.

It all starts as soon as patients walk into the office. Make sure they are comfortable in the waiting room and discover if they need help filling out those lengthy forms. If needed, escort the senior adult to and from exam rooms, rest rooms and different offices. If there is a long wait, have someone check up on them and let them know they haven't been forgotten.

When older patients are seen, they want to know that the doctor has time for them and is willing to listen to their concerns. If this is a hospital visit, reintroduce yourself each time. Lots of health care practitioners stop by their room all day long so it is easy to forget which person does what. Alleviate the situation as best as you can. Being in a hospital can be very stressful for anyone.

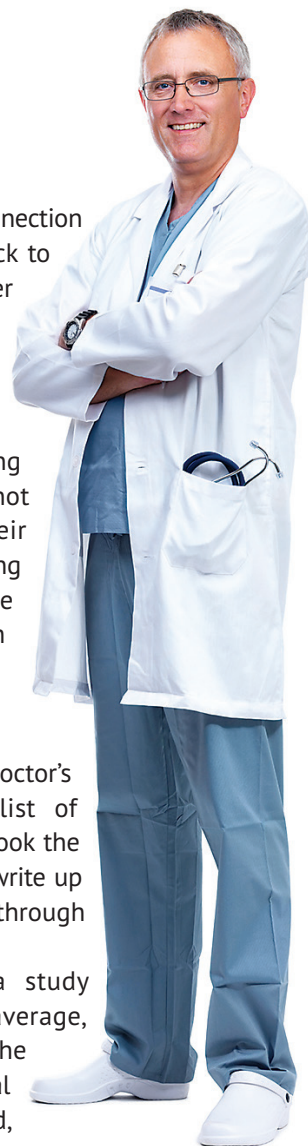
Sure, your day is incredibly busy, but if you fire questions at them and throw lots of information their way all at once,

you are sure to lose any connection necessary to lead them back to health. Speak a little slower and give them time to process what you say, the NIA recommends.

Learn to recognize when patients are belittling their own concerns and not mentioning some of their symptoms. They may be doing that because they feel like they are taking up too much of your time, according to the NIA.

It is highly recommended that patients enter their doctor's office with a prepared list of health concerns that they took the time to think through and write up beforehand. Let them go through their entire list with you.

The NIA pointed to a study that found doctors "on average, interrupt patients within the first 18 seconds of the initial interview." Once interrupted,



patients are likely to eliminate some of the items on their list, thereby not giving you all the information you need to make a proper diagnosis. Instead, let them know you are interested. Show empathy by saying such phrases as "That sounds difficult" and "I'm sorry you're facing this problem; I think we can work on it together," according to the NIA.

Avoid medical jargon and terminology they probably won't understand and probably will just frighten them. Let them know what tests you are ordering and why, and ask if they understand or have any questions. It will help if you write down the name of the diagnosis and all recommendations and medications. That will make it easier to follow the recommended care and make them more relaxed. Something as simple as drink more water should still be written down. It is easy to gloss over the easy instructions when so many other terms and names of medications are tossed around.

Even common medical words may need explanations. To an older adult, cancer may mean a death sentence. Dementia may mean insanity. Times are changing rapidly in the medical field. Guide them through their diagnosis.

Spend a few minutes summarizing the visit. Make sure patients understand their health issues and what they must do. Ask them if they foresee any problems in carrying out the treatment plan.

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CHATTING WITH YOUR PARENTS

So you think you really know your parents? In an article on the website AgingCare, writer Marlo Solitto discusses how your parents can be very familiar while also mysterious. Do you know a lot about their childhood besides the names of those aunts and uncles? Believe it or not, your mother probably had other boyfriends before she married your dad. She also may have dreamed about having a particular career that either never worked out or morphed into something different. Your dad may have been on all the school's sports teams or started working when he was barely a teenager. These are things they have not really thought about in years and may enjoy reminiscing.

Dr. Robert Butler, a physician, gerontologist, psychiatrist and Pulitzer Prize winner who died in 2010, was one of the first experts to realize reminiscing has benefits. He called it life review, and declared it isn't done enough because society has a negative attitude on aging and tends not to embrace the value of senior adults.

Life reviews allow older adults to share their memories and pass on their wisdom without fear of people thinking they are just rambling. This helps them better understand themselves and their identities as well as resolve past issues, according to Butler.

Any of these ideas can remind people of their youth and their accomplishments, which could lead to setting future goals and coming to terms with their past, according to Butler. Reminiscence therapy has also been found to lower depression and increase feelings of happiness, especially in older populations.

Other topics that often bring out new information involve contemplation. Asking what happened on the best day of their life or their earliest memory or what was their childhood home like can bring out enlightening information for both the questioner and the one answering.

Remember, according to Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde, "conversation about the weather is the last refuge of the unimaginative." He also said, "Ultimately the bond of all companionship, whether in marriage or in friendship, is conversation."

Hopefully, this Senior Resources Guide gave you some helpful ways to communicate better and feel more comfortable when speaking with new people or old friends you haven't seen since before the pandemic.

For those who are used to staying at home, either alone or with their spouse, the best advice is to step out, but gradually and at your own pace. A return to the senior center may

AGINGCARE.COM LISTS SEVERAL QUESTIONS TO GUIDE REMINISCING SESSIONS.

- *In what ways do you think I'm like you? And not like you?*
- *Who is the person who influenced your life the most?*
- *Do you have a lost love?*
- *Which new technology have you found most helpful in your life? Which do you find to be the most annoying?*
- *Is there anything you have always wanted to tell me but never have?*
- *Is there anything you regret not having asked your parents?*
- *Do you wish anything had been different between us, or would you still like to change something?*
- *What was the happiest moment of your life?*
- *What are you most proud of?*
- *How did your experience in the military mold you as a person?*
- *What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?*
- *What is your earliest memory?*
- *Did you receive an allowance as a child? How much? Did you save your money or spend it?*
- *Who were your friends when you were growing up?*
- *What was your favorite thing to do for fun?*
- *What was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects? What did you eat for lunch?*
- *What school activities and sports did you participate in?*
- *Do you remember any fads from your youth? Popular hairstyles? Clothing?*
- *What world events had the most impact on you?*
- *How would you like to be remembered?*

be a good first step, especially if you recognize your fellow card players and exercise partners. But if everyone seems different, it is never too late to make a new friend.

When you were younger, you ended up spending a great deal of time with coworkers, parents of your children's friends or neighbors. It may have seemed so simple to make friends then, but according to the folks at Harrogate Life Care in Lakewood, NJ., even those close bonds took a while.

A study in the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships notes that it takes about 50 hours to move from acquaintance to casual friend, nine hours to move up to friend and more than 200 hours to create a close friendship.

But you have that kind of time now, especially if you are no longer working, are an empty nester or most of your family has moved away. The easiest way is to seek out people who have the same interests and enjoy similar activities. It also helps if the person shares some of the same life experiences, like being a new grandparent or even a widow.

Besides having something to look forward to and shared good times, research shows that social interaction is good for your health. Research also shows that people with friends and a social support system tend to live longer

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SENIOR RESOURCES *guide*

and enjoy better physical and mental health.

So seek out someone nearby who may walk past your house daily or attend the same religious institution or other social group. Finding that person is the first step. Forming and maintaining that friendship comes next. Renewing a friendship from the past, or just pre-COVID-19, probably is the easiest way to go. You already know that you can be comfortable and enjoy each other's company.

If you haven't heard from them in a while, it is time to reach out, even if it is just virtually. Then set up a meeting for coffee, a movie, a walk or whatever you both enjoy together. Or walk around the neighborhood and give a friendly hello to the people you pass. One of them is bound to smile back, and maybe even start walking with you.

Good ways to meet new people include stopping by the local senior center; volunteering; joining a book club, card game, knitting or cooking group; enrolling in a class at the local college, which often is offered for free or at reduced cost for seniors; working out at a gym; attending religious services; and participating in community-wide events. If you love to read, see if there is a book club or ask around to see who reads similar books and start up a conversation about why you liked – or didn't really enjoy – a book. If that goes well, you've just made that initial bond toward what could be a strong and lasting friendship.

If you live in a senior living community, many of those activities probably take place daily now that most

residents and staff are vaccinated. An activities director or other employee may even be willing to match you up with someone they believe could be a friend.

Make eating a social time. Find a meal companion. Walk around the facility. Join others who are working on a jigsaw puzzle, playing a game or watching television. It is always difficult at first, don't let that discourage you. Once you gain confidence in your conversation and friendship-building skills, seek out the new person who recently moved into the facility. Show them around. Be their friend, and help them make other connections as well.

According to John Green, author of "Turtles All the

Way Down," "In the best conversations, you don't even remember what you talked about, only how it felt. It felt like we were in some place your body can't visit, some place with no ceiling and no walls and no floor and no instruments." [WJW](#)

This guide was written by Suzanne Pollak, senior editor/writer at the Jewish Council for the Aging of Greater Washington. Learn more about JCA at www.accessJCA.org or call us at 301-255-4200 or 703-425-0999. Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/AccessJCA> or Twitter at <https://twitter.com/AccessJCA>.



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- How damage to the brain at each stage impacts mental capabilities and behaviors
- How long each stage is estimated to last
- Information to help you prepare for your dementia journey

We will follow COVID-19 guidelines during this event such as social distancing, hand sanitizing and mask wearing.



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**Thursday,
December 9, 2021**
10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Location:

**The Lutheran Church
of St. Andrew**
15300 New Hampshire Ave.
Silver Spring, MD 20905

RSVP: 301-847-3051 or
[SilverSpringArdenCourts@
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Tam Cummings, Ph.D., Gerontologist
Author, *Untangling Alzheimer's: The
Guide for Families and Professionals*

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