



Caring for Caregivers

AGE IS JUST A NUMBER

Birthday parties with black balloons and crepe paper, cards that make fun of getting old. You're too old to be (fill in the blank). Name-calling, for example, "geezer", "old bag" or "dirty old man". Elder-speak which addresses the elderly as "dear", "sweetie" and "honey". 90% of marketing dollars target people younger than 50.

These are all examples of ageism, of negative stereotyping of the elderly. Even the elderly may hold negative or patronizing views of aging.

Several studies have found there is a relationship between cognitive health and the individual's views on aging. A 2015 study found that an individual's positive views of aging seem to have a protective effect on the brain. A Yale study supports this finding and reports the brain changes that are hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease are much more prevalent in older adults who decades earlier had expressed the most negative ideas of what it means to be old. Another finding is those who have positive views of aging at 50 live 7.5 years longer, on average, than those who don't. Ageism is truly a health issue and needs to be addressed by our health care system and society as a whole.

February 2021

Mom Always Liked You Best

Siblings who never got along in childhood and may have had little contact as adults may suddenly be forced to make difficult decisions together. Adult siblings who become caregivers are unlikely to agree on all caregiving decisions. There are several reasons for conflict: 1. Uneven input. One sibling may be trying to call all the shots without input from other siblings. 2. Money decisions. Siblings disagree on how their parent's money should be spent or feel a lack of transparency from the child who is handling the bills. 3. Different priorities. Disagreements over safety, housing, driving and health decisions are common. 4. Criticism and sabotage. Childhood patterns, power struggles and rivalries rear their ugly heads. 5. Elderly parents can play a part by unintentionally favoring one sibling over another.

There are steps to take that can dial down sibling conflict and promote cooperation. Almost always there is one adult child, often a daughter, who will take on the majority of caregiving. This caregiver is responsible for asking for what they need and not "doing too much." Getting siblings involved early on and divvying up tasks that play to sibling strengths is important. Hold regular family meetings in person or virtually, and remember to listen and respect each other and no name-calling! Use a facilitator if needed to ensure everyone has a chance to speak and to help everyone stick to the "here and now". Remember there are memories and grief to share.

Spousal caregivers and adult children also have conflicts about caregiving for spouse/parent. Providing respite for the spousal caregiver can reveal how their sick parent is doing, and how well their caregiver parent is providing care. The caregiver parent may need financial or home care support. Adult children may need to make the difficult decision to seek care for both parents.

Zoom Support Groups

Elderhaus offers two virtual caregiver support groups weekly. All community members are welcome. Every Monday 1-3 p.m. or Wednesday 9-11 a.m. Please send your email address to caregivers@elderhaus.org and you will be sent an invitation with a link to join the meetings. Even though we can't meet in person we can still offer support to each other.

Who Will Care For Me?

Baby Boomers will soon be making the transition from caregivers to care recipients. According to an AARP study, in the years 2030 to 2050, all remaining baby boomers will be aging into 80+. The study also reports that 2/3 of Americans believe they will rely on their families to meet their needs for long-term services and support. Since family caregivers are a key factor in the ability to remain at home when disability strikes, what changes can we expect to see as baby boomers become care recipients?

From 2010 to 2030, the ratio of caregivers to those who need care is expected to plummet. More bad news—by 2030 the population aged 45-64 is projected to increase by only 1% while the 80+ population is projected to increase by a whopping 79%. These numbers highlight how reliance on family caregivers is not sustainable. The availability of family caregivers is shrinking dramatically, leading to a dramatic increase in the elderly who will need institutional care. America's public policies and services have not kept pace with changing demographic and social trends.

Developing better models of care that don't involve residential care for the elderly is a priority. More home care options will be needed. Policy and practices that keep seniors as independent as possible can reduce the need for residential care. Communities that support independent, inter-generational and accessible living for seniors are important for the future. Smaller care facilities, reforms in staffing and better business models can improve our long-term care facilities. Long-term support and services will need to change to meet the changing demographics.

Happy Valentine's Day Happy Valentine's Day Happy Valentine's Day

Love is insanity. Love is blind. Love is an act of endless forgiveness. Love is being stupid together. Love is or it ain't. Love is everything. Love is the greatest gift. Love is friendship set on fire. Love is the answer. Love is the gift of oneself. Love is sharing your popcorn. Love is war. Love is risky. Love is a choice. Love is kind. LOVE IS CAREGIVING. LOVE IS CAREGIVING. LOVE IS CAREGIVING...

Valentines Day is bittersweet for most caregivers. Our loved one may no longer recognize us. We feel alone with someone who is there-but-not -there. Memories from past Valentines Days may haunt us. But we do have a choice, and that is to practice self-love on Valentine's Day. Flowers, respite time we gift ourselves, and maybe even chocolates we have to hide. Maybe a romantic movie during which we fall asleep. We needed to sleep anyway.

Elderhaus is open on a limited basis. Details are posted on our website elderhaus.org and Facebook page. Support services for caregivers are available virtually. Contacts: Tim or Danita @970-221-0406 or caregivers@elderhaus.org

