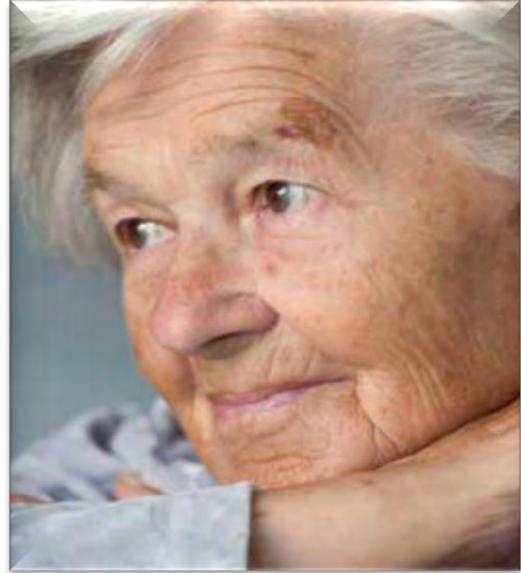


Transitions: Senior to Elderly – Life Review

By Kate McCarthy

Ever try to help a senior cross the street or reach out to steady a senior descending the stairs. Most likely you won't be thanked for your trouble. Most seniors will show a bit of temper when treated as frail or in need of help. Today's seniors are enjoying life to the fullest and don't wish to be reminded that old age is encroaching on them. So when a person reaches advanced years and transitions into being truly elderly, there are often some difficulties with adapting to the next stage of life.



*A review of one's life
is a natural part of aging.*

There are four psychological phases that the aging naturally go through as they make the transition from being a senior to being elderly. These stages are 1) Slowing; 2) Life Review; 3) Transmission; and 4) Letting Go. Working through each stage is important for the emotional well-being of the aging. Even though it can be difficult to go through each phase, voiding or denying the process may result in anxiety, anger and bitterness at end of life.

Being aware of the common characteristics of each stage is very helpful for the aging and their families. For those facing advanced age, it is helpful to recognize the signs of transition rather than be thrown for an emotional loop as life begins to change. For families, knowing what to expect is important as it is often those closest to the aging that must help their loved ones go through each stage.

2) Life Review

A natural response to the slowing down of advanced age is spending time in reflection of one's life. This review covers everything from a lifetime of memories and experiences to re-evaluating past and present relationships to re-assessing conflicts that remain unresolved. For most elderly, it is the understanding that time is now limited that prompts them to shift through their life story and come to terms with its impact and value.

For many of advanced age there is a sense of urgency to work through this review process. They may feel alarmed that time is passing and they have not yet made sense of what their life has meant. As they take stock of their past, many elderly also look to the future to consider what they will do with the time that remains. This is a time of introspection which needs to be aided by family and friends.

The telling of stories from an elder's past is one way the aging sort through their memories and pass on their perceptions and experiences. The passing on of their stories and the knowledge and wisdom they have gained, is how the elderly work out the meaning and value of their lives. For people of advanced age, the sharing of their history helps in finding the grand meaning in their existence and aids in accepting their mortality. These stories and pearls of wisdom are considered a valuable and so family and friends need to really listen and respect the gift their elder is giving with them. They need to recognize that they are not just listening to old stories, but receiving the legacy of a life as well as assisting their loved one in his work of life review.

It is often difficult for elders with memory issues to complete this stage of the aging transition. They become stuck in the task of evaluating life and grow distressed at not being able to make sense of their existence. Yet even for those with cognitive limitations a life review is possible with patient assistance and an accepting environment.

Being able to face mortality and move on without anxiety is the goal of life review. Many elderly need help in focusing on the positive aspects of life as they go through the life review transition. Family and friends play an important role in providing encouragement and support necessary to move through this transition. Yet ultimately it is the work of the elderly to go through this review and move on to the next phase of their life. It takes great courage to come to terms one's life and learn to accept it without regrets.

Sources: "The Psychological Tasks of Old Age" by Victoria Fitch, www.windhorseguild.org, 5/15/13.
"The Old-Old Years" by Brenda Sue Black, M.S., www.wvu.edu.com, 6/1/13.



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