

Transitions: Senior to elderly – Transmission

By Kate McCarthy

There are four stages people pass through as they transition from being a senior to elderly. Each individual is different in how they navigate through and experience these phases of advanced age, but generally most people go through:

- 1) Slowing – a time of slowing in pace, motor functions and memory.
- 2) Life Review – a time of reflection of one's past with the goal of finding meaning in their existence.
- 3) Transmission – a time of passing on the essence of one's life to others.
- 4) Letting Go – a time of stripping down the excesses of life and learning to just be.



It is very important to the elderly to be benefactors to those they love.

Being able to identify each stage as a person enters it is very helpful to both the elder and the family alike. For those making the journey through advance age, knowing the signs of the various stages make it a little less stressful as life begins to change. For the family of an aging loved one, it is often necessary to assist an elder as they pass through each stage. Having an understanding of what to expect and how to help can make the passage much easier for everyone.

3) Transmission

Just as the first stage of physical and cognitive slowing leads to the second stage of life review, the phase of introspection leads to the third stage of Transmission. Transmission is the passing on to others the culmination of what was gathered in the elder's life. This can be anything from physical possessions to small gestures of care. The giving is what is important in this stage of advanced age. It is the passing on of things, great and small, that mark this time.

- Inheritance - It is common for those entering advanced age to start sort through their physical possessions. This taking stock of their belongings and determining who to pass them onto is usually a conscious and methodical process. Bequeathing a life time of possessions to the next generation is one very practical way the elderly pass on important aspects of their lives to those they care about. These gifts needn't be of great financial value, but can have great sentimental significance to the giver. People of advanced age have a strong desire to be benefactors to those they care about.
- Experience – Elders are rich in experience, knowledge and practical skills. In living a full life they have gained the understanding of not only how to do things, but how to think about life. They long to pass this experience and understanding on to those who will receive it. Their lessons of life can be imbedded in instructions on inconsequential matters and so are often missed by the busy listener.
- Wisdom - As the world slows for those in advanced age, there is a great awareness of detail that is gained. This understanding of the intricate details of life is what elders wish to pass on to those around them. Detailed direction on how to arrange flowers or set the table can be full of the essence of wisdom to those who take the time to receive it.
- Grace - In many cases it is not the gift itself that is important to the elderly. What shines in their eyes is the exchange that is made between themselves and those they care about. In the act of giving and receiving, the elderly are able to bring their loved ones into their slowed world and show them a perspective of life in its simplest form. Those who truly take the time to receive all the elderly want to give come away with a sense of grace and a deeper understanding of humanity. The elderly at this point are able to teach us by example what it means to be human.

Advanced age brings with it many challenges. Frailty, failing health, cognitive concerns, physical pain and emotional anxieties all burden the aging to one degree or another. These challenges make the time of transmission all the more urgent to those in that stage. Facing mortality prompts the aging to go through the process of sorting out and tidying up their life. The stage of transmission is an important step in doing in preparing for the final stage of letting go.

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.



HomeAid Health Care
Helping Hands at Home

Kate McCarthy is Director of Operations for HomeAid Health Care which provides services for the elderly who wish to remain safe and independent at home. HomeAid is sister company to Prairie Home Assisted Living which has served the physical, spiritual, mental and health needs of their residents since 1999. Together the two companies provide comprehensive care for the elderly in the Fox Valley.