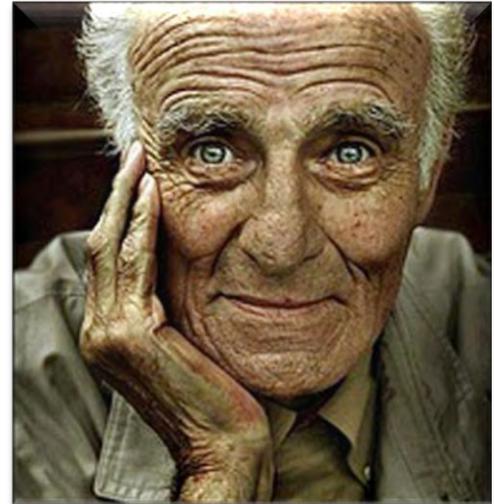


Transitions: Senior to Elderly - Slowing

By Kate McCarthy

Most seniors don't usually categorize themselves as "old or elderly". Many will bristle at being treated as frail or dependent and will actively work at remaining as young as possible. Seniors look forward to retirement age with plans of finally having time to enjoy family, the opportunity to travel or pursue personal interests. They are encouraged with opportunities to do things, go places and experience life like no aging generation has been in the past. So when today's senior reaches advanced years and frailty begins to be an issue, the transition into advanced age can be very difficult.



Slowing is a natural part of aging.

There are four psychological phases that the aging pass through as they transition from senior to elderly. These stages are 1) Slowing; 2) Life Review; 3) Transmission; and 4) Letting Go. Recognizing and understanding the characteristic behaviours being elderly of each stage is helpful for families and the aging alike. For the aging themselves, recognizing the transition into advance age can be difficult, frailty often just sneaks up on a person before they are really ready for it. Knowing the signs of that transition can help with acceptance of the next stage in life. For family it is often necessary to assist their loved one through each stage of advancing age and knowing what to expect can make it easier on all involved.

1) Slowing

One of the most visible indicators of the transition from senior to elderly is the process of slowing down. Except in the cases of illness, slowing is a very gradual process. For most healthy individuals, advanced age is noticeable by the lack of speed in all functions. This is the time of slowing in pace, motor functioning and biological processes. There is also a reduction in speed in certain intellectual and memory functions. The physical slowing of advanced age takes over all aspects of life and brings with it formidable physical and psychological implications.

- Focus on bodily maintenance - For the advanced elderly, a trip to the bathroom may take a half an hour and buttoning up a sweater or finding one's socks may take another 20 minutes. The basics of living takes up the bulk of the day, leaving the elderly essentially only the time to focus on the routine tasks of daily care.
- Focus on details - Rather than quickly completing multiple tasks as one does in their youth, the elderly pay attention to the details of one task at hand. Their focus on minute details may be frustrating when it comes across as being particular or difficult, yet taking the time to listen and help with those details is an act of love.
- Focus on routines – For the advanced in aged life is simplified into daily routines and schedules. These routines, which are followed strictly, provide stability as the elderly is face with an ever increasing fast paced world they can no longer keep up with. Asking an elder to interrupt or change his routine can be met with resistance and needs to be approached gently and with advanced notice.
- Focus on the negative - The advanced in age are often traumatized by personal losses of health and loved ones. They may feel of isolated from family and harbor resentment of being relegated to institutions for the old. The elderly face many

challenges in keeping a positive outlook on life and not succumbing to hopelessness.

- Focus on fears – Many elderly people grow confused and tend to panic when confronted with the fast pace of life. These moments of forgetfulness and disorientation create great anxiety. Humiliation at loss of memory, loss of physical competence and occasional states of confusion all create paralyzing fears of being incapacitated and being unable to care for one self. This cycle of fear can cause the aging to shut down emotionally, psychologically and physically.
- Focus on being rather than doing – The challenge for the elderly lies in making a healthy relationship with slowing. It requires abandoning the pace of life from the past. There is no longer the future to consider, but a focus on the present. To be able to relax and accept just being rather than doing is a great challenge for the elderly, who have clung to remaining active and productive all through their senior years.

Today's aging often faces the transition of slowing without the support of a safe and loving environment. Without that support the elderly can perceive their natural process of slowing as being a nuisance.

Natural aging for the elderly unfolds only in a caring atmosphere; one enriched with life and love, communication and relationships. It used to be that the elderly remained centered in the family life, helping with the raising of children and acting as the living history of a family. The youth were taught to slow down to a pace acceptable to their elders and to wait on them respectfully. It is in a caring environment the aging are accommodated as they go through the first transition stage of becoming elderly.

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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