



S.O.S.

SENIOR OUTREACH SERVICES

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND AGING

As with individuals of all ages, older adults may experience issues related to mental health. For many seniors, the stigma is more severe since most seniors grew up in an era when having a mental disorder diagnosis meant you were “crazy” and institutionalization was likely. However, treatment can be successful, and key to sustaining quality of life. Some issues may be associated with changes or losses common to aging.

Depression and Anxiety

Depression itself is not a normal part of aging, but many seniors (and even healthcare providers) believe it is. Multiple losses, such as loss of spouse, family, and friends, loss of independence, loss of physical functioning, increased dependency on others, as well as social isolation can lead to feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness. Depression can sometimes result from poor diet or medication side effects. Some symptoms of depression include recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, changes in sleep patterns, weight loss or gain, and loss of interest in activities once enjoyed.

In addition to traditional symptoms, anxiety disorders in older adults may manifest as complaints about physical symptoms. For example, an elder may complain about chest pain or diarrhea, but appropriate medical tests find no physical cause of the chest pain or bowel problems. For many, it is likely that they experienced anxiety at a younger age, but were able to “cover it up” with life activities or with support from their spouse or children.

Bereavement

Bereavement is a normal part of coping with the loss of someone or something significant to us, and we all grieve in our own way. For older adults, losses often occur in rapid succession, sometimes without the opportunity to grieve in a healthy manner after each death or loss. When grief remains prolonged or unresolved, it can lead to other serious problems, including depression, anxiety disorders and even physical illnesses like heart trouble.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse has been considered a growing problem for the elderly. Because seniors are more likely to be retired or socially isolated, it can be difficult to detect if the older person is struggling with alcohol or substance abuse problems. Sometimes individuals may misuse or overuse prescription medication. Complications from substance abuse may look like other problems, such as balance problems, liver disease, malnutrition, or dementia.

Your S.O.S. Care Manager can help to determine appropriate steps for those struggling with mental health issues. Psychotherapy or “talking therapy,” as well as medication management might be part of the treatment plan. Both treatments have proven to be successful.

This information is brought to you by Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles, the community’s leading agency in providing care for the elderly. To learn more call: **(323) 932-0316** or visit **www.jfsla.org/sos**.