



# CARING FOR OLDER ADULTS DURING COVID-19

While COVID-19 has amplified conversations about mental well-being, some older adults may be unwilling or unable to discuss how the pandemic has affected them psychologically. This difficulty poses a unique challenge for informal caregivers who are concerned for the mental well-being of loved ones. If you're caring for an older adult who may be experiencing a decline in their mental well-being during the pandemic, the following tips may be helpful.

## 1 Start a conversation

Older adults might not be comfortable discussing declines in their mental well-being. They may even find direct questions about it offensive. To help broach the topic, consider statements that begin with "I've noticed lately . . ." followed by "I'm concerned/worried . . ." Remember, while it could take several attempts to engage your loved one in such a conversation, it's important that you continue to check in with them.

## 2 Ask about changes

Changes in behaviour can indicate a decline in mental well-being or act as a warning sign of future distress. To help you gauge how your loved one is doing psychologically, ask these types of questions about changes to their routines and social habits:

- How have you been sleeping?
- How has your appetite been?
- Have you been keeping up with your hobbies?
- Have you been in touch with your friends recently?
- Have you been going to your appointments?
- How is your physical health?

Such inquiries may also open to the door to more sensitive questions, like how their mood has been or whether they've experienced any losses that may be contributing to behavioral changes.

## 3 Listen attentively

While an older adult may never say, "I'm feeling depressed," they may say, "nothing matters" or "there's no point." If your loved one makes such apathetic statements, especially if that's out of character for them, dig deeper. Ask them *what* doesn't matter or *why* there's no point.

Also listen for comments related to death, increased substance use, or a lack of adherence to medication schedules. These types of remarks, which could further indicate a decline in mental well-being, need to be addressed.

## 4 Offer validation

If a loved one shares their struggles with you, avoid responding with "at least . . ." statements, which can minimize their experience. Focus instead on validating their emotions with phrases such as, "With everything you've been going through, it's understandable that you're feeling down." Your loved one will be more likely to continue sharing when they feel they're being heard and understood.

For more guidance on empathetic listening, see our [tips on talking to someone in crisis during COVID 19](#).

## 5 Encourage safe outings

If your loved one is comfortable going outside, encourage them to do so, especially if they have someone who can safely accompany them. Getting out of the house is an opportunity for social interaction, physical activity, and connection with nature, all of which can help reduce anxiety.

## 6 Seek external support

Explore mental health resources for older adults and caregivers alike. To find mental health services near you, contact your local branch of the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#). Services may also be available in your community to help with things like meal delivery, transportation to appointments, and telephone check-ins.

If you're caring for a person with dementia, visit Alzheimer's Society of Canada specialized [tips for caregivers](#).

If they have access to the internet, encourage your loved one to review our [tips on how older adults can protect their mental wellness during COVID-19](#). The [Fountain of Health website](#) also has helpful information on optimal aging and lots of practical resources to promote mental and physical wellness.

## 7 Take care of yourself

When you're preoccupied with concern for a loved one, it can be easy to neglect your own needs. But to be an effective caregiver, you must also care for yourself. Check the pulse on your own mental well-being regularly and get support when you're feeling overwhelmed. Don't be too proud to ask for and accept help of any kind. If possible, reach out to other caregivers who can relate to some of your challenges.

For further guidance, see the blog posts on [self-care](#) and [checking in with yourself](#) by Denise Waligora, a Mental Health Commission of Canada [Mental Health First Aid training and delivery specialist](#).



For more information, visit [www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/covid19](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/covid19)



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