



# A Guide to How to Help Older Adults During the Coronavirus Pandemic

## THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON OLDER ADULTS AND THOSE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

Older Adults are among the highest risk of physical complications from COVID-19 because of age and higher likelihood of having chronic and underlying conditions. Additionally, social distancing can cause people already sheltering at home to feel increasingly more isolated, as it has become increasingly more difficult for loved ones, family members, friends and neighbors to care for, check-in and spend time with older adults and those living with disabilities. Thankfully there are lots of ways you can help!

## ESTABLISHING A TRUSTWORTHY RELATIONSHIP IS ESSENTIAL

It is widely reported in the news that older adults and those living with disabilities are at higher risk of becoming a target of scam artists and those looking to capitalize on a stressful situation, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Receiving a phone call from an unknown individual can cause anxiety, making it more difficult to gain trust, therefore, it is essential to establish a good working relationship right away. The ideal person to call an older adult or person living with disabilities is someone that is already known to the individual, making it more likely for them to share valuable personal information about their situation and what assistance they may need. If this is not possible, it is best to be honest up front, informing the person of the intent of your call, to check on them, and that there are people out there looking to take advantage of them and this situation. If they feel uncomfortable, encourage them to call the **COVID-19 Older Adult Resource Phone Line at (707) 784-1607**.

## HELPFUL TIPS AND ADVICE FOR GETTING THROUGH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

There are many helpful tips and resources available to older adults and those living with disabilities to help protect their health, manage their relationships, use technology, gain access to reputable sources of information and connect with service programs, including, but not limited to financial, housing and food assistance programs. Consider these following tips to share, including:

### (1) Remind people to shelter at home and wash their hands regularly

Older adults and those living with disabilities are at higher risk of physical health complications due to COVID-19, and therefore are recommended to shelter at home, per the public health order. It is also important to encourage washing hands often and for at least 20-seconds to help prevent the spread of the disease.

### (2) Be mindful of visiting skilled nursing and assisted living facilities (Off limits for now)

Most skilled nursing and assisted living facilities have established routines and protocols in place for the cold and flu season, however, COVID-19 is different, and what makes it particularly dangerous is that most carriers do not exhibit any symptoms at all – but are still contagious to others. If you do not feel well, it is best to stay at home and follow the instructed guidelines from health care providers. Consider sending cards, letters and artwork from family members to stay in touch.

### (3) When you call to check-in, focus conversation on boosting mental health

When you call an older adult or an individual living with disabilities, don't just talk about COVID-19. Make sure the person is taking all the right precautions to protect themselves, check-in to see that they



have all the resources they need, and then focus the conversation on something else. You may also want to consider staying on the phone a little longer than usual, helping to combat the loneliness people may already be feeling – as isolation has a dramatic effect on mental health. If the conversation concerns you that mental health issues may be significant, call the COVID-19 Older Adult Resource Phone Line at (707)784-1607 for possible referral to a mental health professional.

#### (4) Encourage the shop and drop routine

Consider offering to go shopping for groceries or to pick-up online food orders for older adults and those living with disabilities to help them avoid the risk of becoming infected with COVID-19. Call to schedule a time to drop off essential items like toiletries, cleaning supplies and food at the door. If the individual needs food assistance, consider offering to submit their name and information to the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano or Meals on Wheels for food delivery services.

#### (5) Explore the world of technology together

Many people have electronic devices, including tablets, computers and smartphones, but may not know how to use them to their full potential. During the COVID-19 pandemic, technology is playing a crucial role in keeping communities connected (at a safe distance), including phone calls, text messages and video chats. Inquire what technology the individual has, what they are comfortable with, and what they may like to do with it, like video chat with a grandchild – and help them achieve these goals together.

#### (6) Help them find telemedicine

Many older adults and individuals living with disabilities have standing doctor's appointments, and, while visiting a doctor's office may not be possible in all situations, telemedicine has quickly become the new normal, pairing medical professionals up with patients through video chat platforms. Help these individuals get equipped and comfortable with telemedicine appointments and make sure their healthcare insurance providers support this option.

#### (7) Information resources you can trust

There is a lot of misinformation on the Internet, and in a global pandemic, that misinformation can be deadly. Consider (gently) reminding older adults and those living with disabilities to consider the sources in which they get their news and information, asking them to consider news sources that are valid, including, but not limited to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization and Solano County website, just as a few examples.

#### (8) The importance of keeping occupied

Since older adults and those living with disabilities may spend more time inside, it is important to help remain occupied to encourage good mental health. Consider gifting books, puzzles, decks of cards, craft kits, games, grownup coloring books and movies to help pass the time without necessarily counting the hours. Remember, if the items aren't new, make be sure they are disinfected before donating.

#### (9) Keeping good company, but at a safe distance

Staying in touch with older adults and those living with disabilities during the stay at home health order is essential for good mental health, as well as staying healthy. Consider creative ways to stay in touch without physically being there, including playing board and card games online, talking on the phone and hosting regularly scheduled family get-togethers on video chat platforms.