

What It's Like to Be Elderly

For older Californians, life can be stressful and overwhelming as losses accumulate. In a single year or two, an individual could lose their spouse, their health, their ability to drive, and their ability to live independently in their home.

In some countries, the elderly enjoy an elevated social status because of their life experience and the wisdom they have to share. An extensive family network shares responsibility for older family members, who view it as an honor and opportunity to repay the debt of those who cared for them when they were small.

But in America's "youth culture," it's easy for the elderly to feel devalued and pushed aside in favor of those who are more attractive, more agile, and more productive. By the same token, an increasing number of adult children feel squeezed between the needs of both their parents and their children.

While there are no easy answers for the elderly or their caregivers, there are some things that can make elder care easier.

Most health insurance policies cover the service of MFTs so long as the services are "medically necessary." This typically includes coverage for face-to-face sessions for a diagnosable mental health problem. Such coverage may be limited. Please contact your health insurance company for detailed information about the coverage available to you and your family.



California Association of
Marriage and Family Therapists

7901 Raytheon Road, San Diego, CA 92111-1606
Phone: (858) 292-2638 Fax: (858) 292-2666
www.camft.org

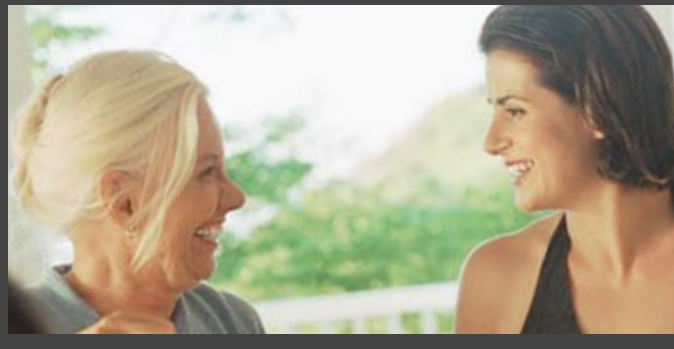


WHEN THE GOLDEN YEARS AREN'T SO GOLDEN:

Caring for the Elderly



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SHARING THE CARE

The emotional, physical, and social needs of the elderly can seem all-consuming to those who care for them. Caregivers need to find ways to balance their self-care with the needs of those who need them.

Some Types of Help that Are Available

Assure the elderly person in your life that your goal is to help them maintain the most independence safely.

1 Adult day care. These centers offer a welcome respite from full-time care giving. Centers offer three types of care: social activities and meals for elders who can benefit from more engagement; more intensive health, therapeutic and social services for those in need of nursing home care; and Alzheimer's specific care. Many offer services on a sliding fee scale.

2 Non-medical home health care. Some home health agencies specialize in a wide array of services that include light housework, laundry, scheduling or preparing meals, errands, transportation, and telephone check-ups.

3 Social services. These can range from Meals on Wheels (serving up visits with meals) and affordable housing programs to senior outreach and protective services programs that can assist frail adults. Seniors are often most receptive to such services when they are proposed by a respected professional, such as a physician.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- ❑ **Practice self-care first.** You can only be a good caregiver if you take time to ensure your own well-being through enjoyable activities, respite from care giving, and maintaining your own health through diet and exercise.
- ❑ **Learn about your loved one's condition.** This will help you plan ahead and know what to expect as the illness progresses.
- ❑ **Show sensitivity.** You can help an elderly person maintain dignity by speaking to them in the same way you like to be spoken to and by sitting to speak at eye-level to someone in a wheelchair.
- ❑ **Offer time to sit and talk.** Consider visiting with take-out sandwiches rather than showing up to make a home-made meal if your loved one would rather spend your time together talking.
- ❑ **Set limits.** When an elderly person makes unreasonable demands or is inflexible, critical or negative, change the subject and focus on the positive. Explain what you can and will do and what you cannot. Set time limits for discussions of health complaints and then decide what merits action.
- ❑ **Find a support group.** You can tap into new resources to provide respite, hope, and reassurance.
- ❑ **Consult with a Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT)** who specializes in elder care issues. MFTs can provide counseling for the elderly that reduce anxiety, provide emotional support and use interventions that result in more satisfying daily life.

OFFERING EXTRA SUPPORT About Marriage and Family Therapists

Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are relationship experts. They work with individuals, couples, families, children, adolescents, and the elderly, providing support and perspective as patients struggle with life's challenges.

Licensed by the State of California, MFTs are psychotherapists who are uniquely trained and credentialed to assess, diagnose, and treat a wide range of issues so individuals achieve more adequate, satisfying and productive relationships and social adjustment.

The California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT) is an independent statewide non-profit organization made up of over 28,000 practicing Marriage and Family Therapists. CAMFT is dedicated to advancing marriage and family therapy as a healing art, science, and mental health profession. In fact, CAMFT sponsors TherapistFinder.com so Californians can gain access to qualified local experts who can help.



Seeking a Marriage and Family Therapist or other mental health professional to assist with life's difficulties is a sign of courage and a step in the right direction. Always ask about a therapist's special areas of expertise (e.g. grief counseling, children's issues, relationship counseling) before you engage them to ensure it's the right fit for you.

TherapistFinder is a California-wide interactive, online directory that is user-friendly and searchable by name, location, and area of expertise. It's your introduction to one or more qualified psychotherapists who hold a California license.

