LIVING WITH THE TIMES

A MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT TOOLKIT FOR OLDER ADULTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee
In the absence of internationally agreed upon guidance on the production of easy-to-read documents, this version of the material has been adapted in consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities.
Translations, accessible formats and adaptations

Please contact the IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (mhpss.refgroup@gmail.com) for the coordination of translations and preferred formats. All completed translations and versions will be posted on the IASC MHPSS RG website.

If you create a translation or an adaptation of this work, kindly note that:

- You are not allowed to add your logo (or that of a funding agency) to the product.
- In case of adaptation (i.e. changes to the text or images), the use of the IASC logo is not permitted.
- In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that IASC endorses any specific organization, product or service.
- You should add the following disclaimer, in the language of the translation: “This translation/adaptation was not created by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The IASC is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original English edition ‘Inter-Agency Standing Committee: Living with the Times: a mental health and psychosocial support toolkit for older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic’ shall be the binding and authentic edition.”

For an overview of all completed translations and formats of Living with the Times: a mental health and psychosocial support toolkit for older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, see: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/mental-health-and-psychosocial-support-resources-covid-19
Introduction

This toolkit is titled, ‘Living with the Times: a mental health and psychosocial support toolkit for older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic’. It has been developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (IASC MHPSS RG).

This resource includes:

- Posters with key messages for older adults on how to take care of their well-being and
- How they can provide support to those around them during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.
- It includes instructions for facilitators of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) on how to conduct guided conversations with older adults using these posters.
- The posters build upon the guidance sections for older adults in:
  - The IASC Interim Briefing Note Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of COVID-19 Outbreak, and

This toolkit was developed through a participative process. Pilot testing was done to understand what style of illustrations and designs worked best for older adults.

A total of 199 older adults aged between 60 and 90 years, from 51 countries, provided inputs to the design and content.
These suggestions and ideas were taken via an online survey and a number of focus group consultations. Based on this feedback, the IASC MHPSS RG revised the posters. They developed this facilitator guide through a thematic adhoc steering group, in close collaboration with agencies specializing in the well-being of older adults.

These agencies include colleagues from:

- The International Federation on Ageing
- HelpAge International and
- Alzheimer’s Disease International.

The process was a unique inter-agency collaboration between experts from different disciplines, including dementia, MHPSS in humanitarian settings, and ageing and disability.

Through a network of country-level MHPSS Technical Working Groups, the posters were then tested with 80 older adults from:

- a wide range of countries,
- based on geographical location and
- different income groups and
- contexts.

This testing phase included older adults living in humanitarian settings from a total of 10 countries.

The facilitator guide was reviewed based on inputs from Member Agencies of the IASC MHPSS RG.
The posters with key messages:

- require minimal reading skills,
- are culturally diverse and
- aim to engage older adults in conversations and activities.

The IASC MHPSS RG collected feedback on different designs for the posters. This feedback was used for finally making them in the style you will find in this IASC product.

Our sincere appreciation goes to all the older adults who guided and participated in the development of this toolkit. This is a tool to be used by all COVID-19 and humanitarian responders. They can use the toolkit to help treat the mental health and psychosocial well-being of older adults as a priority.
Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on older women and men. Disproportionate here means that the impact has been more on them. They are at a higher risk of developing more severe symptoms of the disease and of dying as a result. This increased risk is partly due to age-related changes to the immune system. These changes make it harder to fight off diseases and infection. Older adults are also more likely to have underlying health conditions. Underlying means conditions they already have. They could have health conditions such as lung, kidney, cardiovascular or cerebrovascular disease or cancer. They would need to take multiple medications concurrently- that means at the same time. These health conditions make it harder to cope with, and recover from illness, including COVID-19.

The stress, economic hardship and social isolation associated with both short-term and long-term measures put in place to contain COVID-19 may affect:

Psychological well-being,

Intensify underlying mental health or

Neurological conditions, including common conditions such as depression and anxiety, and

Also potentially increase the risk of worsening cognitive decline and/or of suicide.
Older adults, may also be at higher risk of experiencing newly presented symptoms of mental health and neurological conditions, especially:

Women who live alone. Or women who have limited social contact in normal situations.

Older adults living in vulnerable situations.
Vulnerable conditions could include living in poverty, refugee settings, violence and abuse, or being very frail or weak.

Some older adults may react more strongly to stressful events. They may take more time to recover from stress. This can affect both their mental and physical health.

There are some measures put in place to contain the spread of COVID-19 to protect older adults (such as shielding). These have created additional economic pressures and burdens for them. Financial worries include:
Families facing unemployment or job losses and
Higher out-of-pocket expenditure for health and
Added expense for Social welfare services because resources are diverted to COVID-19 response efforts.
Within the group of older women and men, referred to as “older adults”, there is a great diversity of ages and abilities. The diversity of this population, as with any age group, will have an effect on their level of vulnerability. Factors that play a key role in the extent to which an individual is at risk or can be a support for their community include:

- Gender,
- Age,
- Disability,
- Ethnic origin,
- Sexual orientation (LGBTQI+),
- Social connectedness,
- Literacy levels,
- Poverty,
- Work opportunities and
- Other factors

For example, older adults who have migrated to their current country of residence may have fewer social connections. They may not have access to the main language of information about the pandemic. Other older adults maybe proactively supporting their friends. They may be a part of emergency response efforts. They may be running hotline or helpline services. Older adults may be one of the last population groups for whom lockdown measures are lifted.

This is due to their health risk profile.
This would increase the time spent by them in social isolation.

If COVID-19 transmission rates remain high, older adults may also remain at higher risk of infection. Even when disease-related measures are lifted.
Older adults may be particularly afraid of becoming infected with COVID-19.
They may be afraid of infecting family and friends.
Stress related to COVID-19 may also increase the pre-existing fears and anxieties related to dying or dying alone.

For these reasons, it is important that older adults remain mentally healthy and active during the pandemic.
Purpose

The purpose of this activity toolkit is to share recommendations with older adults on how to protect their health and well-being. The purpose is also to share how older adults too can provide support to those around them, during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The toolkit contains five large poster illustrations. These can be printed out or shown on a screen. Each poster addresses one of the following questions:

1. How can I stay healthy?
2. What can I do to improve my mood?
3. How can I feel connected to my family and community?
4. Where can I get help if I need it?
5. How can I cope with grief and loss?

The posters aim to provide answers to these questions. These are provided in formats that are accessible. They require minimal reading ability.

They are universal in nature.
They represent different cultures, settings and regions. However, discussions that arise from the illustrations should consider the:

socio-cultural,
economic and
gender contexts.
The facilitator notes for each poster provide details on this point.
These were developed so that each poster can be discussed by itself.

As a result the instructions may feel a bit repetitive at times. However, this was done to allow for the separate use of each poster.

The illustrations can guide conversations. These can invite the viewer or viewers to interact with the image. Each poster can be used as an activity. Older adults can spend time with them. They can find solutions to the five key questions by themselves or in a group setting.

The activities are best facilitated by:
a group leader,
a mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) worker or a volunteer who is familiar with the needs of older women and men in a specific community or context.
However, older adults can also review the posters in their own time. They can engage in conversations with one another. They can use them as discussion points in social gatherings.
Facilitator Notes

Before you start, here are some general instructions and tips for facilitating the activity:

1. Familiarize yourself with the content of the toolkit and the illustrations.
   Think about how to introduce the themes in the posters.
   Keep your specific community or context in mind.

2. You can conduct the activity in groups or through individual sessions.
   Where culturally or socially indicated, the activity should be arranged separately for people according to gender.

3. The posters do not have a set order.
   The posters and instructions in this toolkit were designed so that each poster can also be used by itself.
   It is recommended that you start with the poster that is most relevant to your specific group of older women and men.
   This could be based on:
   - context which includes ‘urban versus rural setting’ or ‘refugee versus host population’,
   - gender-specific differences,
   - preferences or religious practices
   - as well as any specific issue that the older person or persons might have.
4. Posters are best printed on A3 size paper, with the minimum size being A4 paper. They can also be shown on large screens. Make sure not to show these on mobile phones or tablets. Choice of the format or medium to show the posters will depend upon the characteristics of your specific audience ie whom you are showing these to.

5. During group or individual sessions, make sure to follow physical distancing, according to what is recommended by the guidelines in the country. Also ensure that COVID-19 safety and hygiene measures are in place. These include:

- Wash your hands often. Use soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Maintain a safe distance from anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- Wear a mask when physical distancing is not possible.
- Don’t touch your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Cover your nose and mouth with the inside of your elbow or a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Stay home if you feel unwell.
- If you have a fever, cough or difficulty breathing, seek medical attention.

6. Create a warm and friendly atmosphere. Listen to what the older person or persons shares. Endorse or support their feelings.
7. Make sure that chairs or spaces are adapted and adequate for the comfort of people with any disability. There should be ramps at the entrance to allow entry for older adults with reduced mobility.

8. Make sure that you are able to face the older person or persons. This will help you to communicate with your eyes and gestures as well as talking alongside. Keep in mind that you might have to wear a mask. Speak loudly and clearly so that older adults who might be hearing-impaired can understand you. Check whether they require reading glasses to look at the posters.

9. Allow plenty of time to listen. Make sure that the information shared is well understood. Recap what you shared. Ask the older adult or adults to recap what they understand. For example, you can ask, “Am I clear? Do you want me to repeat the information?” You could check, “How would you like to continue?”
Poster 1: How can I Stay Healthy?

Why is this important?

It is natural to feel anxious, worried, distressed or lonely at times due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Older women and men who live alone, or have limited social contact in everyday situations may feel more anxious, distressed or lonely. However, there are many activities that older adults can do. These activities can protect their mental well-being during times of stress.

COVID-19 measures may require older persons to be in lockdown for longer. Therefore it is even more important for them to stay physically healthy and active.

An active and healthy lifestyle may help older persons in many ways:

- It may help them maintain their physical and mental health over the long term,
- Remain flexible and mobile and
- Reduce any functional or cognitive decline^1.
**Key messages**

To stay physically and mentally healthy during the pandemic, it is important for older women and men to:

- Follow daily routines or create new ones.
- Sleep and eat at the same time every day.
- Stay hydrated and eat healthily.
- Be physically active.
  They can remain active by aiming for at least 30 minutes of low-impact exercise each day.
- Be mentally active.
  Suggestions for activities include doing puzzles, crosswords or mental fitness exercises, playing musical instruments, chess or dominoes, etc.
- Take all their medication as prescribed by their health care professional.
  They should not stop taking their medication unless told to do so by their doctor.
In the poster, you can see a person or a group of people doing the following:

1. Jogging
2. Waking up and going to bed at regular times
3. Gardening and doing housework
4. Reading a newspaper
5. Eating healthily and at regular times
6. Riding a bicycle
7. Playing games at a safe distance to keep mentally active and socially engaged. Physical distancing does not mean social isolation
8. Walking
9. Making tea
10. Drinking plenty of water, also when outside, for example, while sitting on a park bench.
11. Taking medicines that have been prescribed. It is important to take medication as prescribed. Do not stop taking medicines unless told to do so by your health care professional.
12. Doing outdoor relaxation exercises or tai chi
13. Picking up medication that have been prescribed from the pharmacy. Plan your medication refills and renewal of prescription in advance. Set a reminder for yourself.
14. Buying groceries to keep daily routines and eat healthily.

You may need to:
- adapt your routine,
- wear a face mask,
- avoid busy times at the local market,
- ask others for help.

---

Instructions

1. Before showing the poster, ask the older adult or adults:
   How are you keeping yourself healthy?
2. Give the older person or persons some time to reflect or think. Take notes of what they say.
3. Now show them the poster.
   If printed, it should be at least A4 size. It is better if it is A3 size paper.
   Tell them: “Take a look at this poster. Spend a few moments thinking about it.”
4. Give them time to review the poster.
   Watch their reactions while they are looking at the illustrations.
5. After a few moments, ask guiding questions to start the conversation.
   Here are some suggestions:
   “Are you already doing any of the activities that you see in the poster?”
   “Which of the activities that you see in the poster, would you consider doing in the future, to stay healthy?”
   “Did you think of any other ideas after looking at the poster?”
   “What else could you be doing to stay physically healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic?”
Listed below, are some questions that might come up during this activity. The answers that are likely to be given, are also given along with the questions.

**Question 1.** The people, environment and cultural context do not look familiar.
Does that mean the activities do not apply to me?
**Answer 1.** The illustrations are meant to be universal and are general. They can be used by people all over the world. Some scenes or people may look more familiar than others. Use your imagination. What would activities; women or men; or houses look like in your local setting?

**Question 2.** How can I undertake the activities shown in the poster, in the context of COVID-19?
**Answer 2.** Stick to local restrictions as much as possible. This might include practising physical distancing and wearing a face mask.

**Question 3.** Do I need to undertake all of the activities shown in the poster to stay healthy?
**Answer 3.** No, the poster is meant to provide you with a range of ideas. Pick activities that you find interesting and best fit your daily routine.
Question 4. Will, involving myself in volunteering work at a community level help to keep me healthy?

Answer 4. You will feel connected, motivated and valued, when you volunteer or do some faith-based activities or with women’s or men’s groups.

Question 5. Why are the people shown alone in their homes, not wearing a mask?

Answer 5. Wearing a mask protects you and others from infection. If you are at home alone, you do not need to wear a mask.

**Tips - ALERTS**
There are many things that are important for maintaining good physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include:

- Regular hand hygiene,
- Physical distancing,
- Cough etiquette,
- Mask wearing, etc.

This poster and the activity toolkit in general, focus on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

For general health tips for older adults, refer to the following:

   [https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-on-covid-19-for-older-people](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-on-covid-19-for-older-people)

2. “Older people & COVID-19”
   [https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/covid-19](https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/covid-19)
The posters show many different scenes, locations and cultures. Some older persons may get confused with this. To avoid this confusion:

- Encourage them to interpret these scenes. They can consider the ones that they can relate with.

- Make sure to mention that there are many different ways to stay healthy. Not all these ways are depicted in the poster.

- Ask older women and men what they are doing to stay healthy. Ask them what new ideas the poster suggests. What are the different activities they may not have considered before, to help them stay healthy.

- Encourage older women and men to think about the activities depicted in the poster. Think about what might work best for them. Which activity would they like to try out?

For more health advice for older adults, visit WHO’s website on COVID-19 and older adults, see:

Poster 2: What can I do to improve my mood?

Why is this important?

Older adults are at an increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19. This may make them particularly afraid of becoming infected, of dying or dying alone, or of infecting family and friends.

They may also experience the loss of close friends or family. They may not be able to attend their funeral. Older adults may feel socially isolated as a result of restrictions. They may spend a longer time in lockdown. They may be shielded due to their high-risk profile. Older adults are also at higher risk for abuse and neglect.

All these factors may increase the risk of mental health issues to older adults. They may experience symptoms of new mental health issues or The underlying mental health issues may get intensified, and / or Neurological conditions, may affect their sense of motivation and psychological well-being.
Key messages

To help improve the mood of older women and men during the pandemic, it is important that they:

- Have a daily routine
- Engage in activities that are enjoyable
- Talk to their family and friends regularly
- Focus on activities that bring them joy. They should make these activities part of their daily routine
- Try relaxation, meditation, breathing and low-impact exercises
- Consider cutting down on news updates or at least find a balance. This is important to give their mind a break from media reports that can cause panic and stress.
- Draw on or use their strength, experience and knowledge to deal with the situation.

In the poster, you can see a person or a group of people doing the following:

1. Looking at the stars, being mindful, thinking about the positive things in your life, feeling and practising gratitude. Gratitude means being thankful.
2. Knitting, sewing
3. Painting/drawing
4. Enjoying a meal with family or friends
5. Regularly speaking with family and friends over the phone
6. Doing pottery or other craft activities
7. Playing cards with family or friends
8. Reading a book
9. Going out and/or helping others to go out
10. Relaxation or meditation or breathing exercises
11. Gardening
1. Before showing the poster, ask the older adult or adults:
   What can you do to improve your mood?

2. Give the older person or persons some time to reflect or think.
   Take notes of what they say.

3. Now show them the poster.
   If printed, it should be at least A4 size, better A3 size paper.
   Tell them:
   “Take a look at this poster. Spend a few moments thinking about it.”

4. Give them time to review the poster.
   Watch their reactions while looking at the illustrations.

5. After a few moments, ask guiding questions to start the conversation.
   Here are some suggestions:

   What thoughts or ideas did came to your mind when you saw the poster?
   Are you already doing any of the activities that you see in the poster?
   Which of the activities that you see in the poster would you consider doing
   in the future to improve your mood?

   How does watching or reading or listening to the news make you feel?

   Listed below, are some questions that might come up during
this activity.
The answers that are likely to be given, are also given along with the questions.

Question 1: How can I improve my mood if COVID-19-related measures do not allow me to visit friends and family?

Answer 1: There are many different ways to improve your mood. These include:
- Establishing daily routines,
- Engaging in pleasant activities and
- Speaking with friends and family over the phone or face to face as much as possible.

However, you have to adhere to local restrictions when meeting friends. Adhering means obeying. These restrictions may include physical distancing and wearing a face mask.

Question 2: What are breathing and relaxation exercises? How do they work?

Answer 2: These exercises help you to focus on relaxation and your breathing. These help you to reduce tension and sleep better. Ask, “Would you like to practise an exercise together?”
Question 3 The people, environment and cultural context do not look familiar.

Does that mean the activities do not apply to me?

Answer 3 The illustrations are meant to be universal and are general.
They can be used by people all over the world.
Some scenes or people may look more familiar than others.
Use your imagination. What would activities; women or men; houses look like in your local setting?

Question 4 Do I need to undertake all of the activities shown in the poster to stay healthy?

Answer 4 No, the poster is meant to provide you with a range of ideas.
Pick activities that you find interesting and best fit into your daily routine.

Question 5 Why are the people shown alone in their homes, not wearing a mask?

Answer 5 Wearing a mask protects you and others from infection.
If you are at home alone, you do not need to wear a mask.

There have been reports of increased levels of violence occurring in the home during the COVID-19 pandemic.
This includes violence against older adults.
Look for signs of violence and offer support as appropriate.
You may find useful information in the WHO publication, the link of which is posted below.
It contains key actions for relevant stakeholders.
They can use these to prevent or reduce interpersonal violence.

Some older adults may feel confused because many different scenes, locations and cultures are shown in the poster. Encourage them to interpret these scenes. They should consider the ones that they can relate with. Make sure to mention that there are many different ways to think more positively and to improve their mood.

Ask older adults what new ideas they get from the poster. What ideas about new activities do they get, that can help them improve their mood. Which activity would they like to try out?

Encourage older women and men to think about the activities shown in the poster that might best work for them.

Ask older women and men where and how they access news. Ask whether or not this meets their needs. If necessary, help them in finding a balance. A balance between staying informed and watching or reading too much news or media. Too much media can cause panic and stress.

You can find more information on how to cope with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, see: 
https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/coping-with-stress.pdf?sfvrsn=9845bc3a_8
**Poster 3: What can I do to feel connected with my family and community?**

**Why is this important?**

Being socially active reduces the effects of stress on your body. Remember, physical distancing is not the same as social isolation. Physical distancing does not have to lead to loneliness. Staying socially connected is very important. It helps maintain psychological well-being and cognitive health.

**Key messages**

For older adults to feel connected with their family and community, it is important that they:

- Help others if they can.
- They can become a volunteer.
- An older person can feel valued when they engage in meaningful work or tasks.
- Talk to their family and friends regularly.
- Continue with community, religious and/or spiritual involvement.
- For example, you can follow services on the television, radio or the Internet if available.
• If available
  ▪ Join community or
  ▪ Peer support groups or
  ▪ Use telephone helplines or
  ▪ Groups on social media,

In the poster, you can see a person or a group of people doing the following:

1. Praying with their religious or their spiritual group
2. Chatting with their community groups
3. Reading to children
4. Watching television as part of family time
5. Staying in regular contact with family and friends.
   Keep in touch with them via the Internet or telephone
6. Staying in touch with family.
   Doing activities together.
   For example, three generations building a bird house
7. Staying in touch with neighbours or friends.
   You can have a brief chat over the fence
8. Walking with a friend who needs support.
   You can also set up a walking group.
Instructions

1. Before showing the poster, ask the older adult or adults:
   How do you currently stay connected with your family and community?

2. Give the older person or persons some time to think.
   Take notes of what they say.

3. Now show them the poster.
   If it is printed, it should be at least A4 size, better A3 size paper.
   Tell them: ‘Take a look at this poster. Spend a few moments thinking about it.’

4. Give them time to review the poster.
   Watch their reactions while they are looking at the illustrations.

5. After a few moments, ask guiding questions to start the conversation.
   Here are some suggestions:
   • What thoughts or ideas came to you when you looked at the poster?
   • Are you already doing any of the activities that you see in the poster?
   • Which activities that you see in the poster, would you think about doing in the future, to stay connected?
Listed below, are some questions that might come up during this activity. The answers that are likely to be given, are also given along with the questions.

**Question 1:** If COVID-19-related measures do not allow me to visit friends and family, how can I stay connected to my family and community?

**Answer 1:** There are different ways of staying connected to your family and community. These may include speaking with friends, family and neighbours. You can speak with them over the phone, online or at a distance. You can do this while observing local restrictions. These include physical distancing and wearing a face mask.

**Question 2:** The people, environment and cultural context do not look familiar. Does that mean the activities do not apply to me?

**Answer 2:** The illustrations are meant to be universal and are general. They can be used by people all over the world. Some scenes or people may look more familiar than others. Use your imagination. What would activities; women or men; or houses look like in your local setting?

**Question 3:** Do I need to undertake all of the activities shown in the poster to stay healthy?

**Answer 3:** No, the poster is meant to provide you with a range of ideas. Pick activities that you find interesting and best fit your daily routine.

**Question 4:** Why are the people shown alone in their homes, not wearing a mask?

**Answer 4:** Wearing a mask protects you and others from infection. If you are at home alone, you do not need to wear a mask.
Tips - ALERTS

Many different scenes, locations and cultures are depicted in the poster.
This may confuse some older adults.

- Encourage them to interpret these scenes.
  Ask them to think which ones they can relate to.
  Make sure to mention that there are many different ways to feel connected with their family and community.

- When they look at the poster, ask older adults:
  Does it give them new ideas to feel connected to their family and community.
  Does it give them ideas about activities they may not have thought of before.

- Encourage older women and men to think about the activities, shown in the poster, that might best work for them.

- Be mindful of the digital divide affecting older women and men.
  This might prevent them from using digital platforms.
  They may not be able to use digital platforms for social interactions.
  They may not be able to access telemedicine, grocery shopping and other services.
  Offer resources if available and applicable in your context.

For information on where, when and how to wear masks visit WHO’s page on mask-wearing, see:
**Poster 4: What can I do to get help if I need it?**

**Why is this important?**

Older adults may not know where or how to seek help, particularly if care services are closed.

Some older adults, including those with:

- disabilities,
- cognitive impairment or
- dementia,

rely on others for basic activities for daily living and functioning.

They may not be able to access the support they need during lockdown.

Support would also not be possible in situations where their caregiver becomes ill.

At the same time, older adults who require caregivers, may be at an increased risk of infection from caregivers and their living environment, example in humanitarian settings.

They may also have difficulty following the guidelines for infection prevention and control.

This may be particularly difficult for those who have disabilities, cognitive impairment or dementia.

Females, both older adults or younger, are often informal caregivers for older adults.

Thus they are at an increased risk of infection and disease transmission.
Many grandparents are part-time caregivers for their grandchildren. Due to COVID-19-related restriction measures, their family caregiving roles is likely to have decreased. This has a negative impact on family coping strategies and support options.

During the lockdown, some older adults may not have access to key essential services and protection. They may not have access to food, medicine, shelter, sexual and reproductive health services and other resources. This may be due to:

▪ COVID-19-related measures, or
▪ A fear of becoming infected and / or
▪ Reduced mobility.

**Key messages**

For older adults to get help if needed, it is important that they:

▪ Contact their health or social care worker.
▪ They must contact them if stress, worry or sadness get in the way of their daily activities, for several days in a row
▪ Talk to their family and friends
▪ Turn to their community leaders or religious or spiritual leaders.
In the poster, you can see a person or a group of people doing the following:

1. Visiting a health or social worker
2. Speaking with a community, religious or spiritual leader
3. Seeking social support by talking to family and friends
4. Receiving a home visit from a health or social worker

Instructions

1. Before showing the poster, ask the older adult or adults:
   "What can you do to get help if you need it?"
2. Give the older person or persons some time to think.
   "Take notes of what they say."
3. Now show them the poster.
   "If it is printed, it should be at least A4 size, better A3 size paper.
   Tell them:
   "Take a look at this poster. Spend a few moments thinking about it."
4. Give them time to review the poster.
   "Watch their reactions while they are looking at the illustrations."
5. After a few moments, ask guiding questions to start the conversation.

Here are some suggestions:

- What thoughts or ideas came to you when you looked at the poster?
- Are you already doing any of the activities that you see in the poster?
- To get help, if you needed it in the future, which of the activities you see in the poster, would you think about doing?

Listed below, are some questions that might come up during this activity.
The answers that are likely to be given, are also given along with the questions.

**Question 1:** How can I get help if COVID-19-related measures do not allow me to leave my house?

**Answer 1:** There are different ways of getting help if you cannot leave your house.

These may include:
- speaking with your health or social worker over the phone,
- utilizing telephone helplines or
- community and peer support groups, or
- calling friends and family.
Question 2: The people, environment and cultural context do not look familiar. Does that mean the activities do not apply to me?

Answer 2: The illustrations are meant to be universal and are general. They can be used by people all over the world. Some scenes or people may look more familiar than others. Use your imagination. What would activities; women or men; or houses look like in your local setting?

Question 3: Do I need to undertake all of the activities shown in the poster to stay healthy?

Answer 3: No, the poster is meant to provide you with a range of ideas. Pick activities that you find interesting and best fit your daily routine.

Question 4: Why are the people shown alone in their homes, not wearing a mask?

Answer 4: Wearing a mask protects you and others from infection. If you are at home alone, you do not need to wear a mask.
**Tips - ALERTS**

Some older adults may feel confused by the fact that many different scenes, locations and cultures are depicted in the poster.

- Encourage them to interpret these scenes. Ask them to consider which ones they are able to relate to the most. Make sure to mention that there are many different ways to get help.

- Ask older adults what new ideas come to them when they look at the poster, including activities they may not have considered before to seek help.

- Encourage older women and men to think about the activities shown in the poster that might best work for them. Which activity would they like to try?

- Write down local numbers and contact details of agencies or partners on the ground that can help.

You can find useful tips for when you are going to a healthcare facility, see: [https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/health-care-facilities_8_1-01.png?Status=Master&sfvrsn=823c9ad5_3/]
How can I cope with grief and loss?

Why is this important?

Like all people, when an older adult loses a family member or a friend to COVID-19, they may experience a wide range of emotions. These include:

- sadness,
- guilt,
- loneliness,
- anger, and
- (ambiguous) loss.\(^4\) Ambiguous loss means a loss that is difficult to process and interpret.

They may have difficulty sleeping, feel very tired or experience low levels of energy.
They may keep thinking about their own death and mortality.
This may cause more anxiety.

All these feelings are natural.
There is no right or wrong way to feel grief or to manage loss.
It may not be possible to visit the family of the deceased person.
This may not be possible because of national or local measures, placing restrictions on movement.
Funeral services may also not be permitted.
It is natural to feel distress around this. This makes the mourning process more difficult. Appropriate cultural, spiritual and religious practices and rituals can ease distress. Enabling these practices, can help the person. It can begin to address the (ambiguous) loss and help mourning and grief in the community.5,6

**Key messages**

For older adults to cope with grief and loss, it is important that they:

- Give themselves time.
  They may think that the sadness and pain they feel will never go away. But in most cases grief eases over time.
  The intensity of grief usually has a link with the intensity of love that they felt for the person when they were alive.

- Acknowledge that losing a family member or friend is a very difficult situation.
  It can trigger many different feelings.
  All these feelings are natural.
  There is no right or wrong way to feel or process grief.

- Remember the happy moments and memories of time spent with the deceased person.
- Speak regularly about their feelings with people whom they trust. Contact with friends, family or community volunteers can help people with the grieving process. It can help them feel connected.

- Turn to their community leaders or religious or spiritual leaders. These leaders are skilled at helping people manage grief and loss. They can help find meaning and help them work through the grieving process.

- Focus on activities that are enjoyable and make them feel happy.
In the poster, you can see a person or a group of people doing the following:

1. Remembering happy moments and time spent with the deceased person
2. Maintaining daily routines while thinking of and remembering the deceased person
3. Talking about happy moments and memories of time spent with a deceased family member
4. Looking at a photo album
5. Playing music
6. Talking about happy moments and memories of time spent with a deceased friend
7. Visiting a community or religious or spiritual leader
8. Walking in nature
9. Looking at photos on a computer or phone

Ambiguous loss refers to situations where people cannot – for various reasons – find closure in their grieving process which leaves them searching for answers.


Instructions

1. Before showing the poster, ask the older adult or adults:
   How do you cope with grief and loss?

2. Give the older person or persons some time to think.
   Take notes of what they say.

3. Now show them the poster.
   If it is printed, it should be at least A4 size, better A3 size paper.
   Tell them:
   ‘Take a look at this poster. Spend a few moments thinking about it.’

4. Give them time to review the poster.
   Watch their reactions while they are looking at the illustrations.

5. After a few moments, ask guiding questions to start the conversation.
   Here are some suggestions:
   - What thoughts or ideas did you get when you looked at the poster?
   - Are you already doing any of the activities that you see in the poster?
   - Which of the activities you see in the poster, would you think about doing in the future, to cope with grief or loss?
Listed below, are some questions that might come up during this activity. The answers that are likely to be given, are also given along with the questions.

**Question 1:** How can I cope with grief and loss, if I cannot visit a dying friend or family member, or attend funeral services?

**Answer 1:** There are different ways of coping with grief and loss. Even if you cannot visit a dying friend or family member or attend funeral services. These are some ways that may help you cope with grief or loss:

- Regularly calling friends and family,
- Speaking with your community, religious or spiritual leader
- Focusing on activities that are give you pleasure and make you happy
- You could also perform a personal ritual to help the grieving process. Ritual means a ceremony.
- If the deceased person was a friend, call their family members. Offer your condolences and show them how you are feeling.

**Question 2:** The people, environment and cultural context do not look familiar. Does that mean the activities do not apply to me?

**Answer 2:** The illustrations are meant to be universal and are general. They can be used by people all over the world. Some scenes or people may look more familiar than others. Use your imagination.

What would activities; women or men; or houses look like in your local setting?
Question 3: Do I need to undertake all of the activities shown in the poster to stay healthy?
Answer 3: No, the poster is meant to provide you with a range of ideas. Pick activities that you find interesting and best fit your daily routine.

Question 4: Why are the people shown alone in their homes, not wearing a mask?
Answer 4: Wearing a mask protects you and others from infection. If you are at home alone, you do not need to wear a mask.

**Tips - ALERT**

Some older adults may feel confused by the fact that many different scenes, locations and cultures are depicted in the poster.

- Encourage them to interpret these scenes. Ask them to consider which ones they are able to relate to the most. Make sure to mention that there are many different ways of reacting to and coping with grief and loss.

- Ask older women and men what new ideas came to mind when they saw the poster. This should include activities they may not have considered before to cope with grief and loss.

- Encourage older women and men to think about the activities depicted in the poster that might best work for them.
• Encourage older women and men to draw on their own strength and experiences.
  To identify strategies that have helped them to cope with grief and loss in the past.

• Identify older women and men who show signs of complicated grief or may be at risk of depression or self-harm.
  Provide additional guidance.
  Refer them to:
  - social services,
  - protection agencies,
  - health care providers or
  - other available services.

For more information on how to cope with grief and loss during the COVID-19 pandemic visit WHO’s Q&A page for older adults. See:

Posters

The posters are best printed on A3 paper.
The minimum should be A4 size paper.
Or it should be shown on large screens. Not on mobile phones or tablets.

For the five posters in high-resolution format and for printing instructions, see:
https://app.mhpss.net/toolkit-for-older-adults-during-covid-19-pandemic
or email:

mhpss.refgroup@gmail.com.
Challenge your brain
Keep to your daily routines or create new ones
Sleep and eat at the same time every day
Stay hydrated and eat healthily
Be physically active (aim for 30 minutes per day)
Take all your medication as prescribed by your doctor. Do not stop your medication unless told to do so by your doctor.
Have a daily routine
Engage in pleasant activities/hobbies
Talk to your family and friends regularly
Focus on activities that bring you joy and make them a part of your daily routine
Try meditation, relaxation or breathing exercises
Remember you have a lot of strength and wisdom in you
Help others if you can
Talk to your family and friends regularly
Maintain community, religious and/or spiritual involvement,
follow services on the television, radio or internet
Join community and peer support groups or use telephone helplines
Contact your health or social care worker, if stress or sadness get in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

Talk to your family and friends.

Turn to your community leaders or religious or spiritual leaders.

It is natural to feel anxious, worried, stressed or lonely at times. Speaking about it can help you.
Give yourself time. You may think that the sadness and pain you feel will never go away, but in most cases, grief lessen over time. Remember the happy moments and times spent with the family member. Turn to your community or spiritual leader. They are skilled at helping people manage grief and loss and can help you through. Focus on activities that are enjoyable and make you feel happy.