

Providing Independent Living Support: Training for Senior Corps Volunteers

Module 8

Beyond Companionship Services: Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life

*Providing Independent
Living Support:*

***Beyond Companionship Services:
Helping Clients Improve
Quality of Life***



Trainer: _____

Date: _____

PROVIDING INDEPENDENT LIVING SUPPORT: TRAINING FOR SENIOR CORPS VOLUNTEERS

Module 8: Beyond Companionship Services: Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life

Introduction

Many clients are dealing with quality of life issues, including loneliness and social isolation, feelings of uselessness or helplessness, and the effects of physical or cognitive limitations. This 60-75-minute session will provide tips and suggestions that volunteers could use to help clients improve their quality of life. In addition to a short lecture, the session includes a brief warm-up exercise, a more extensive small group exercise, and a reflection worksheet.

Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Further their understanding of the term “quality of life” and how this might differ from person to person.
- Gain ideas for assisting clients to improve quality of life while maintaining appropriate volunteer-client boundaries.

Visual Aids (PowerPoint) and Facilitator’s Notes

If you are using the PowerPoint slides included with this curriculum, Facilitator’s Notes are provided under each slide (to see them, select “View...Notes Page” from PowerPoint’s main menu). These notes provide the same information as the Facilitator’s Notes and Instructions included in this document, however, they are not as detailed; the PowerPoint Facilitator’s Notes are primarily main points for the presenter.

If you do *not* use the PowerPoint slides, we suggest you create other visual aids such as handouts or transparencies, or copy the information on easel paper and post it for participants. Duplicating the exercise instructions on slide 6 would be the most helpful.



Handouts

The handouts for this session follow the facilitator’s notes and instructions. Handouts 1-3 should be distributed during the session; this symbol in the Facilitator’s Notes will cue you as to when: 📄. Handouts 4-6 can be given out at the end of the session.

1. What is “Quality of Life” for You?
2. Telephone Tips for Accessing Resources
3. Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life: Tips and Suggestions
4. Reflection: Respecting Boundaries
5. Additional Resources: Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life
6. Training Feedback Survey

Session Outline

Discussion Topic	Estimated Time	Method/Activity	Slide Numbers
I. Welcome and Introduction	10 min.		1
A. Learning Objectives	5	Lecture	2
B. Volunteer Contributions to Clients' Quality of Life	5	Lecture	3
II. Defining Quality of Life	15 min.		
A. Warm up: What is Quality of Life for You?  <i>What is "Quality of Life" for You?</i>	10	Individual, pairs Large group discussion	4
B. Lifestyle Factors that Effect Quality of Life	5	Lecture	5
III. Helping Clients Improve Quality of Live	45 min.		
A. Accessing Local Resources  <i>Telephone Tips for Accessing Resources</i>	5	Large group discussion	
B. Exercise: Your Ideas!  <i>Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life: Tips and Suggestions</i>	25	Small group exercise Debrief, large group discussion	6
C. Emotional Suffering: Clients in Difficult Circumstances	5	Lecture	7
D. Reflection: Respecting Volunteer-Client Boundaries  <i>Reflection: Respecting Boundaries</i>	10	Individual, pairs	8
IV. Closing	5 min.		
Last Thoughts  <i>Additional Resources: Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life</i>  <i>Training Feedback Survey</i>		Feedback	9

Facilitator's Notes and Instructions



I. Welcome and Introduction

Show slide 1 – the title slide.

Explain the purpose of this training session: This session will provide ideas and suggestions that volunteers can use to help clients improve quality of life and alleviate loneliness and social isolation, feelings of uselessness or helplessness, and the effects of physical or cognitive limitations.

A. Learning Objectives

Show slide 2.

Read the learning objectives to the group. By the end of the session, participants will:

- Further their understanding of the term “quality of life” and how this might differ from person to person.
- Gain ideas for assisting clients to improve quality of life while maintaining appropriate volunteer-client boundaries.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the session, participants will:

- Further their understanding of “quality of life” and how this might differ from person to person.
- Gain ideas for assisting clients while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

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B. Volunteer Contributions to Clients' Quality of Life

Show slide 3.

Tell participants that helping their clients maintain their independence is the most important contribution they make to their clients' quality of life. However, clients also say that volunteers improve their quality of life by:

- **Doing simple things that make life easier** (help with household chores, groceries, transportation, helping them get out into the community or access community resources).
- **Being a friend**, an understanding and dependable person that they can talk to. Clients appreciate the time and personal attention; they gain a sense of value and dignity often lost due to aging.
- **Giving them something to look forward to**; the consistency of regular visits help clients keep their spirits up and improve their attitudes.

HOW VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTE TO QUALITY OF LIFE

- Doing simple things that make life easier
- Being a friend (doing what friends do for friends)
- Providing consistency, giving clients something to look forward to

3

Source: National Senior Corps Association

II. Defining Quality of Life

A. WARM UP: What is Quality of Life for You?

Show slide 4.

WARMUP: WHAT IS "QUALITY OF LIFE" FOR YOU?

How do you define quality of life?

List 5 things that are most important to your quality of life.



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Acknowledge that "quality of life" is a broad and general term; what is necessary for a good quality of life might be different from one person to the next.

 Distribute the handout *What is "Quality of Life" for You?*

Ask participants to take 2-3 minutes to jot down five things that are important to their quality of life (Step 1 on the handout). Then ask them to pair up with a neighbor and share their responses, and check off the things on their lists that they both listed, if any (Step 2, 2-3 minutes).

DEBRIEF: Ask that someone from each pair call out the "top" shared responses (one or two). Write their responses on easel paper (or ask someone to assist you). As you go around the room adding to the list, mark a check next to those categories (e.g., "good health") that come up more than once, each time they are mentioned.

Large group callout (ask for a show of hands): "We can see how many things we have in common. Now, how many of you had something on your list that was different than your partner's?"

Assuming there are differences...tell participants that this is because people have varying ideas of what is necessary for a good quality of life; it depends on our values, backgrounds, and current situations.

Large group callout (referring to the list on the easel paper): "Which of the things on this list are relevant to clients' situations? That is, what areas might we be able to help them with?"

Underline those areas and ask participants to hold that thought for a few minutes.



TIP: ADDRESS TRAINING EXPECTATIONS. Leave "Post-it" pads or half-sheets of paper around the room and invite participants to write down what they hope to learn today or a particular question they have around today's topic. Collect the papers and read them while participants are doing the exercise. Try to respond to the questions during the workshop or soon afterward.

LIFESTYLE PRACTICES THAT EFFECT QUALITY OF LIFE

- Regular exercise
- Good nutrition
- Not smoking
- Limit alcohol intake
- Challenge the mind



Also: Social support is very important!

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TIP: PROMOTE INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY.

Discuss how volunteers can encourage their clients to get out into the community. How can volunteers assist clients to become volunteers themselves? (Provide a handout on volunteering projects for homebound clients.)

Do volunteers know where to find information on free/low cost activities they might do with their clients, such as art and cultural events, health fairs, social events sponsored by community organizations, or games and plays open to the public that local schools present?

B. Lifestyle Practices that Effect Quality of Life

Show slide 5.

Tell participants you want to take a look at what the research says effects the quality of life among seniors. Over the last century, not only is the health and longevity of the US population continuously increasing, but the quality of life in these later years has also greatly improved. The National Institute on Aging and other researchers attribute the gains among older adults to health-related behavioral changes or practices. These include:

- **Regular exercise:** People who exercise daily are more likely to maintain sharp mental ability, muscle strength, flexibility, heart and lung strength. Exercise can reduce depression and lift self-esteem, help you digest food and sleep better, reduce the risk of falls, and prevent or control diabetes.
- **Good nutrition:** Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and foods low in fat and cholesterol to maintain a healthy weight and help prevent diseases such as heart disease, cancer and stroke.
- **Not smoking:** Not smoking lessens your risk of heart disease, stroke, some cancers, and emphysema.
- **Limiting alcohol intake:** Limiting alcohol to one glass per day reduces the risk of liver disease and certain cancers; however, if you are taking certain medications, you may need to abstain altogether.
- **Challenging the mind:** Psychologists have found that people have far more mental strength in their later years than previously imagined. They are showing that memory loss can be reversed with regular mental exercises.
- **Social support** is not necessarily a lifestyle practice but it is extremely important to a person's quality of life. Social support includes the resources provided by others that enable the person to feel valued and part of a reliable network of support; this could be family, friends, neighbors, volunteers, government agencies, and community groups and organizations that are available to provide support if needed. Studies have found that social support for the elderly tends to slow down deterioration of their health (reducing risks of disease and mental illness), whereas social isolation contributes to suicidal thoughts.



TIP: PROVIDE A LIST OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES. Distribute a list of agencies in your area that provide services to seniors, the types of services they provide, and telephone and website information. If you have a directory of community services with information on eligibility, location, etc., remind participants where they can pick up a copy. See Module 1 for a workshop on this topic.



Tell participants that they are an important part of this social support. They may also be able to influence clients to try healthier behaviors that could improve their quality of life.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2005), and Samaritan Health Services (2004), Kurtus (2002), National Institute on Aging (2001), and Volz (2000).

III. Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life

A. Accessing Local Resources

Tell participants that one important way volunteers help clients improve their quality of life is to help with that social support by connecting clients to community resources.

Large group callout: “What kinds of resources are available in this community to support clients?”

Note the group’s responses on easel paper. Validate and clarify responses as needed.

Tell a story (or ask the group for examples) about how this works. For example: “One of our volunteers brought it to our attention that a client was eating warm meals only sporadically; usually her dinners involved cold cereal or a can of tuna. We looked into the matter and discovered that, as the volunteer suspected, the client was having trouble covering expenses and her nutrition was suffering. The volunteer approached the client, in a very gentle and tactful way, and told her that she might be eligible for a congregate meals program at the senior center. With the volunteer’s help, the client signed up for the congregate meals program and transportation services. These support services improved the client’s nutritional intake and provided opportunities for the client to develop new friendships.”

 Distribute the handout *Telephone Tips for Accessing Resources* (participants can read it later). These tips are meant to help people get the most out of information-gathering calls to social service agencies.

Tell participants you would like to do some group brainstorming on other ways to help clients improve quality of life through suggestions volunteers might make, or the activities volunteers and clients do together.

B. EXERCISE: Your Ideas!

The following exercise will reinforce what participants already know through experience, and allow them to share and learn from each other. During the debriefing, the facilitator can add ideas the participants may not have come up with on their own. The whole exercise, including debriefing, should take about 30 minutes.

YOU WILL NEED:

- Four large poster-size sheets of paper, such as easel paper, titled “Social Quality of Life,” “Emotional/Spiritual Quality of Life,” “Cognitive Functioning and Health,” and “Physical Functioning and Health”
- Tape or tacks to post the easel paper to the wall for debriefing
- At least three markers of different colors for each small group
- Copies of the handout *Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life: Tips and Suggestions*, to be distributed after the debriefing to each participant



EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS: YOUR IDEAS!

1. Divide into four relatively even groups.
2. Discuss ideas for helping clients in the quality of life area your group has been assigned.
3. Write your ideas on the poster and be ready to discuss!

Social = connections to people, community
Emotional/Spiritual = mental health, peace of mind
Cognitive = daily mental functioning and engagement (memory, learning)
Physical = daily physical functioning, health habits

Show slide 6.

Remind participants of the list of quality of life areas that you underlined on the easel paper during the warm-up activity (i.e. those areas where they might be able to assist clients). Explain that they will be contributing their own tips and suggestions in this group exercise. Before they begin, emphasize what should NOT be included (e.g. giving clients medical advice), if you feel this might be a gray area for participants.



TIP: PREPARE FOR DEBRIEF. While participants are working in their groups, refresh your memory by reviewing ideas from the handout you will be distributing (*Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life: Tips and Suggestions*). Also think about the cultural backgrounds of the clients in your service area: Are there special considerations volunteers should be aware of, or suggestions volunteers can offer to improve their quality of life (e.g. preferred social activities or common health concerns)? If participants do not mention it, add suggestions for these communities during the debrief discussion.

INSTRUCTIONS

EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS: YOUR IDEAS!

1. Divide into four relatively even groups.
2. Discuss ideas for helping clients in the quality of life area your group has been assigned.
3. Write your ideas on the poster and be ready to discuss!

Social = connections to people, community
Emotional/Spiritual = mental health, peace of mind
Cognitive = daily mental functioning and engagement (memory, learning)
Physical = daily physical functioning, health habits

1. Divide the participants into four relatively even groups and have these groups gather in different parts of the room so they can have a discussion.
2. Assign each group a quality of life category by distributing the titled easel sheets, one per group. Explain that four broad quality of life categories have been selected. The category “social quality of life” refers to social connections to other people. “Emotional/Spiritual quality of life” refers to a person’s feelings and attitudes, mental health and peace of mind. “Cognitive functioning and health” refers to mental abilities such as memory and learning ability. “Physical functioning and health” involves nutrition, exercise, bodily health, and functioning ability.
3. Ask each group to think about the category they have been assigned and discuss suggestions for helping clients maintain or improve their quality of life in this area, and when improvement isn’t possible, ideas for making the client’s life easier. These suggestions might be activities that the volunteers can do with the client, tips or ideas they might suggest the client do, and/or resources in the community that they believe might help the client. Explain that the categories are general and may overlap sometimes, but that’s okay (in fact, all the better!). For example, activities that contribute to a more active social life can help maintain or improve mental functioning, emotional wellbeing, and depending on the activity, physical fitness. The categories are simply a way to organize and focus the discussion around areas that affect a person’s quality of life. Each group should write their ideas on the easel paper; they will have 10 minutes.
4. After 10 minutes, ask each group to tack/tape their sheets of paper to the wall where everyone can see it.



TIP: MAKE SURE SUGGESTIONS ARE CLEAR AND APPROPRIATE. As you go through participants’ suggestions, be sure to ask for clarification when needed (“Can you say more about that?”) If someone makes a suggestion that is inappropriate, explain why it is not a good idea and cross it off the easel paper so people are not confused. Show appreciation for the effort by saying something encouraging like, “I like your ‘outside the box’ thinking, but...” or “That might be a good idea, as long as you get permission from...” Afterward, you might want to type up the list of the best suggestions and distribute it among the volunteers!

**EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS:
YOUR IDEAS!**

1. Divide into four relatively even groups.
2. Discuss ideas for helping clients in the quality of life area your group has been assigned.
3. Write your ideas on the poster and be ready to discuss!

Social = connections to people, community
Emotional/Spiritual = mental health, peace of mind
Cognitive = daily mental functioning and engagement (memory, learning)
Physical = daily physical functioning, health habits

DEBRIEF

Go to the first easel paper with the Quality of Life suggestions affixed to the wall and ask the group responsible to talk about their suggestions and what they believe the benefit would be for the client.

After the recorder from each small group has had a chance to talk, ask the larger group if they have anything to add to the list. Do this for each of the four categories, taking about five minutes for each. If there is time, ask the group if they have personally tried any of the suggestions. What was their experience?

Here are some examples of suggestions that participants may offer (note some will fit into more than one category, but this is okay):

Social Quality of Life: Volunteer, attend a lecture together, write cards to family members, get a weekly Scrabble game going.

Emotional/Spiritual Quality of Life: Organize old photos in a scrapbook, take a quiet walk in the park together, volunteer; attend a spiritual function; help the client feel safer by participating in neighborhood watch meetings or installing an emergency alert service.

Cognitive Functioning and Health: Attend a lecture together, read the newspaper and talk about current events, do a crossword puzzle, play bridge.

Physical Functioning and Health: Take a walk in the park, cook a healthy meal together, suggest to the client that he/she ask a doctor to recommend an exercise program.

During the discussion, add your own suggestions and any ideas from the handout *Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life: Tips and Suggestions* that you think are noteworthy.

 Distribute the handout *Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life: Tips and Suggestions*. Tell participants they came up with some great ideas; here are a few more suggestions and some tips for opening up the conversation with clients.

Sources: Caregiver Helpbook (2006); National Senior Corps Association.



TIP: REVIEW YOUR POLICY ON CONFIDENTIALITY. Have a conversation about your program's policy on confidentiality. Is it ever okay for a volunteer to tell another volunteer something a client told him/her in confidence? When should a volunteer talk to a family member or supervisor about the client? Give examples of some ethical dilemmas volunteers may find themselves in and how they should be resolved.

EMOTIONAL SUFFERING

- Grief
- Anger
- Feeling helpless or useless
- Loneliness



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C. Emotional Suffering: Clients in Difficult Circumstances

Show slide 7.

For clients who are going through especially hard times, such as grieving for a lost loved one, many of the suggestions are not going to improve their quality of life. However, simply being there for a client and listening can help relieve suffering. Here are some general tips:

- **Grief:** For a client who is grieving, acknowledge your client's feelings and sympathize. Encourage talking about it, but don't push. Reassure your client that it is okay to grieve; grieving is natural and necessary. Offer comfort and support by being there.
- **Anger:** Understand that anger often contains hurt and pain and other complicated emotions, and respond with diffusing statements such as, "This must be a difficult day for you." Don't give advice unless you are asked. Sometimes just listening allows the client the outlet he/she needs to express frustrations and then calm down.
- **Helplessness or Uselessness:** Help your client feel more useful. During visits, ask your client to help with activities as much as possible. Encourage your client to make decisions. Ask for his/her opinions frequently, and show appreciation for the input.
- **Loneliness after you leave:** Remind the client that you will return at the scheduled time. Post a note on the calendar. Talk about what you could do during the next visit so he/she has an interesting activity to look forward to.

Remind the participants that they are not expected to be counselors. If they are worried about a client, they should always speak with their supervisor to determine what appropriate steps should be taken.

Sources: Caregiver Helpbook (2006); National Senior Corps Association.

REFLECTION: RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

- How could you make a suggestion about a change so a client is receptive?
- What questions do you have about volunteer-client boundaries?
 - "Is it okay to...?"
 - "What if ...?"



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D. Reflection: Respecting Volunteer-Client Boundaries

Show slide 8.

Tell participants that they have some good ideas for helping their clients improve quality of life, however they should be prepared for the possibility that these suggestions may fall on deaf ears. Clients may not want to change habits or try new things, and it is important to respect that. For example, a client may be shy and prefer to spend time with the volunteer one-on-one rather than meet new people at the senior center.

 Distribute the handout *Reflection: Respecting Boundaries* and ask participants to take five minutes to answer the questions (this can be done individually or in pairs). After five minutes, ask the group to come together.

Large group callout (question 2 of the handout): "How might you broach a topic about changing a habit or trying a new thing with a client?"

Validate participant responses and talk about appropriate ways to do this: "Here are some suggestions for how you might broach a topic in a way that will improve client receptivity":

- Frame the suggestion as something you are doing and talk about how much it has helped you.
- Bring written material on the topic to share: "This is something interesting I came across..." or "I just heard the most interesting thing about ____ at our in-service training. I thought I might share it with you."
- Suggest this as a new activity you try together. "I'm doing _____; would you consider joining me in this? We may be able to help each other." Brainstorm on how and what to do in order to accomplish the desired change. Keep the project small and reward yourselves when goals are met.



TIP: KEEP THE CONVERSATION ON TRACK. This workshop provides many opportunities for group discussion and sharing. As the facilitator, you will need to keep the discussion moving forward or risk running out of time. See the *Facilitator's Guide* for information on group management and training techniques around timing.

REFLECTION: RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

- How could you make a suggestion about a change so a client is receptive?
- What questions do you have about volunteer-client boundaries?
 - "Is it okay to..."
 - "What if ..."



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Reiterate to participants that it is very important to respect the client's boundaries and wishes. Volunteers can plant a seed and encourage clients to try new activities, but they should not push clients to change. Clients may refuse to participate because:

- They feel comfortable with their daily routine and do not want to make the effort to change.
- They are afraid of trying something new; they may feel uncomfortable in a new environment or with meeting new people.

Large group callout (question 3 of the handout): "What questions do you have today about volunteer-client boundaries?"

Answer as many questions as you can; if you run out of time, make arrangements to answer questions later (e.g. by phone or by email to the group, if possible).



TIP: PUT IT IN WRITING. Do you have a code of ethics or written policy for volunteers about maintaining appropriate volunteer-client boundaries? If not, consider developing a list of concrete examples of appropriate and inappropriate situations (e.g. When should volunteers contact outside resources for social support? When should volunteers encourage clients to participate in new support services? When should volunteers not get involved?) Remind them of your program's policy and where they can get a copy of this information. Emphasize that if they are unsure about any situation, they should always talk with their supervisor.

LAST THOUGHTS

And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.



~ Abraham Lincoln

IV. Closing

Show slide 9.

Tell participants that it is time to end the session, and ask if they have any further questions. After responding to questions, leave them with this last quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln: “And in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count. It’s the life in your years.”

  Distribute the remaining handouts: *Additional Resources: Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life* and the *Training Feedback Survey*.

Additional Resources includes sources for the information presented, and helpful website links for more information on quality of life issues like health and nutrition.

Inform participants that the session is over, and you would very much appreciate hearing their thoughts via the *Training Feedback Survey*. Let participants know their responses are anonymous (no names are required on the surveys), and that the surveys are collected to help improve future training sessions. Make sure to indicate where you would like the completed surveys to be placed.

Thank everyone for coming.



TIP: ASK AN EXPERT. Consider inviting a guest speaker with expertise to talk about specific issues that effect quality of life; for example, what kinds of independent living aids and assistive technology are available, and how might a client acquire them? What are some simple acts that volunteers can do to make the client feel special (e.g., go to a hair salon, arrange for the client to have a manicure)? How can the volunteer make the client feel they are still contributing to society?

References for Module 8: Beyond Companionship Services: Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life

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Handouts

The following handouts are included in this module:

1. What is “Quality of Life” for You
2. Telephone Tips for Accessing Resources
3. Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life: Tips and Suggestions
4. Reflection: Respecting Boundaries
5. Additional Resources: Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life
6. Training Feedback Survey

*Providing Independent
Living Support:
**Beyond Companionship Services:
Helping Clients Improve
Quality of Life***



Trainer: _____

Date: _____

What is “Quality of Life” for You?

Step 1: Individually, take a minute to think about what is important in your life. What are the things that determine the quality of your life (i.e. what kind of a life you have)?



Using single words or short phrases, list the 5 things that are most important to your quality of life. (Of course, there are no wrong answers!)

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

4.) _____

5.) _____

Step 2: Share your list with a partner. Were some things on both of your lists the same? If yes, put a check mark next to those.

Telephone Tips for Accessing Resources

As a volunteer, you are in a position to advocate for your clients. You can help them get information about available community resources, including things like eligibility requirements, procedures, waiting lists, and costs. Usually some information is available on the Internet, but often it is necessary to make the calls. Here is some practical advice for calling agencies and organizations to get information on social services.

Prepare yourself to make the call:

- Review written material (brochures, notices, letters, and information online) if you can. Underline key points, names and phone numbers of people and organizations you might want to call.
- Write down a list of all the questions you want to ask. It is easy to get flustered when someone is rattling off information and you are frantically writing notes. If your questions are written down, you won't forget to ask them.
- "Psych" yourself up to make the call. Do a little role-playing to help you feel more prepared. This will also help you anticipate questions you want to ask, or information you might be asked to provide.
- Accept that you may need to make several calls before you get the information you need. Breaking through the bureaucracy is not for the faint of heart. However, don't assume the worst; most people want to help!

While you are on the phone:

- Tell the person on the line that you don't know much about this and hope he/she can give you some guidance. Make the person feel like your mentor. Complement helpfulness, even if you didn't quite get what you needed. The next time you call, the person will be more willing to go out of their way to get the information for you.
- Be polite but don't allow anyone to brush you off. You have the right to information, especially from public agencies. If you feel you are getting nowhere, ask to speak to a supervisor.
- Always get the name of the person to whom you are speaking. You can address them by name during the call, which helps to build rapport. It also shows you know what you are talking about in case you get conflicting information. For example, you can say, "I talked to Jimmy Johnson at the Dayton office yesterday and he said I needed to get Form XYZ from your office. Is this something you can mail to me or should I stop by?"
- Ask questions! If the person uses acronyms, names, and terms you don't know, stop the conversation and ask for an explanation. Do not let yourself feel rushed or intimidated. Sometimes people don't realize they are using language that is not familiar to everyone.

If at first you don't succeed...

You don't have to do everything yourself! Ask a friend, colleague, or your supervisor to lend a hand. Put the word out that you are looking for information and need help navigating the system. Use the Internet; is there a "listserv" or blog or website related to the service you want to access where you can post a question?

In a nutshell: Be prepared, don't give up, and win support right from the start with your friendly attitude. Catch your flies with honey!



From: "Telephone Tips and Techniques", National Family Caregivers Association: www.thefamilycaregiver.org

Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life: Tips and Suggestions

You are helping your clients remain independent but you are also helping them to improve quality of life. This might involve assisting or encouraging clients to participate in activities to maintain or improve their physical health, cognitive health and memory, emotional wellbeing, and social engagement.



This document contains tips and suggestions for helping clients improve their quality of life, including assisting clients who are grieving, or feeling angry, helpless, or lonely. The advice was collected from published resources and professionals serving the elderly, including Senior Corps program directors. We hope you will find the suggestions helpful!

Suggestions for Activities

Help make life easier!

- Help the client access needed services (e.g. transportation, home safety improvements) by finding information, making calls and appointments, and bringing unmet needs to the attention of the family or your supervisor.
- Help with household chores and organization (e.g. sorting out drawers or closets, taking unwanted items to recycling or a second hand store).
- Assist with errands and appointments.
- Indulge in a “pampering day” (out or at home) with a manicure, hairstyling, tea and a special desert, etc. Use your imagination!

Encourage good health practices!

- Exercise: There might be classes you can take together or simple exercises the client can do at home. Take walks around the neighborhood or park. *Note: You and your client should consult with a doctor before taking on an exercise regimen.*
- Encourage a healthy diet: Help your client plan and prepare meals.
- Encourage your client to get regular health care. Offer a ride to appointments.
- Share brochures on various health topics that you received at in-service trainings.

Challenge the mind with a game, or learn something new!

- Take up a hobby, keeping in mind your client’s ability, interest, and any expenses involved.
- Do a jigsaw puzzle.
- Play cards or a board game.
- Do word and number games such as crossword puzzles, word search, or Sudoku.
- Start seeds in little pots, or work in the garden. Visit public gardens: Is there a community garden or botanical garden in your area?
- Encourage self expression through art projects, cooking/baking together, and music.
- Bring jokes to share.
- Bring magazine articles or books on subjects of interest and read together.
- Learn something new together: See if free classes are available at local community/senior center, visit the library, or attend a lecture or museum exhibit.

Enjoy reminiscing!

- Spend a rainy afternoon watching old movies by a favorite actor. Many old television series are also available on video/DVD; check your local library.
- Put together a collection of old time favorites on a CD or tape. Include music, radio clips, and humor from old time comedians. Look through your collection, your client's collection, and check your public library for recorded materials.
- Write/record your client's story: Record your client's oral history and match photographs to the story; this could be put on a CD to give as gifts to children and grandchildren. Put together a scrapbook or videotape an interview.

Get out in the community!

- Go for a walk, socialize at the senior center, or visit a friend.
- Take your client out to lunch, shopping, or the hairdresser.
- Keep up on local events together: Write letters to the editor, follow a sports team, or attend community events.
- Encourage your client to become involved in volunteer work. Is there a service project you can do together? If your client is homebound, is there an activity he/she can do from home, such as: dispatching other volunteers (e.g. Meals on Wheels), telephone reassurance calls to other homebound seniors, pen pal correspondence with school children to improve their reading and writing skills; sewing, knitting or quilting items for nursing homes, shelters, or hospitals; or assisting projects with mail or phone correspondence? Check with your supervisor; there may be an innovative program in your community for homebound volunteers.

Reconnect with friends and family!

- Help clients reconnect with old friends and family (e.g. assist with correspondence or coordinate a meeting).
- Help write holiday cards or birthday cards. Consider making the cards as an art project.
- Help broaden your client's circle of friends. Ask your client if they would like to invite a friend or acquaintance in for a card game or other social activity.

Tips for Opening up the Conversation

You can encourage your client to change habits and try new things, but never push! There may be a good reason for your client's hesitancy. Instead, start slow and stay positive. Refer to your own experience as the example so the client won't feel as though he/she is being criticized. If the client is not interested, move on to something else.

Here are some phrases to help broach a topic with your client. Once the conversation gets going, you can suggest they join you in the activity, or offer to help them get started.

At our in-service training, I just learned about _____ and I'm going to try it.

Examples:

- "I just learned about how exercise can improve mood and I am going to ask my doctor to recommend a regimen."
- "I just learned some new tips for quitting smoking and this time I'm really going to do it."
- "I just learned how doing regular mental exercises like crossword puzzles contributes to healthy brain function and I'm going to try it."

When I was feeling _____, I tried _____ and it really helped me.

Examples:

- “When I was feeling run down, I changed my diet to include mostly fruits and vegetables it really helped me feel more energetic.”
- “When I was feeling blue, I called a sympathetic friend and poured my heart out, and I felt so much better afterward.”
- “When I was having trouble sleeping, I listened to an audio book that I got at the library and it soothed me to sleep.”

I have an idea for something new we could try together. I know you enjoy ____ so I was thinking we could try _____.

Examples:

- “I know you enjoy cooking so I was thinking we could try a new recipe that is nutritious and easy to make.”
- “I know you enjoy art so I was thinking we could visit that new exhibit at the museum.”
- “I know you enjoy listening to the birds so I was thinking we could build a little birdhouse for the yard.”

Tips to Alleviate Suffering

Loneliness after you leave

- Remind the client that you will return at the scheduled time. Post a note on the calendar. Talk about what you could do during the next visit so he/she has an interesting activity to look forward to.
- Do only small parts of a project so that when you leave, the client still has something productive to work on. Leave your client with an assignment to complete by the next visit.
- Encourage other friendships by helping the client get out and socialize (e.g. at the senior center, church, temple or mosque).
- If you did something fun, encourage the client to call a friend and discuss his/her day with you.
- See if your client can receive telephone reassurance calls in between your visits. Does your supervisor know of a service?

Grief

- Acknowledge your client’s feelings and sympathize. Encourage talking about it, but don’t push. Reassure your client that it is okay to grieve; grieving is natural and necessary. Offer comfort and support by being there.
- Send a card or call the client during times that might be especially hard, such as anniversaries and holidays.
- Escort your client to a bereavement counseling group, or if they practice a particular faith, to meet with his/her spiritual director.
- Take a trip to an area that was a good memory for the client and reminisce.
- Some of the following rituals and activities have helped people who are grieving find comfort: lighting candles, going through photos and talking about the person, visiting the cemetery on special days, planting a tree, flower, or garden in the person’s memory.

Anger, frustration

- Encourage the client to identify the source of the anger. Does the client need help with something? A discussion can help evaluate the source of anger, if any action can remove the source, and what the client might do to control the situation.
- Understand that anger often contains hurt and pain and other complicated emotions, and respond with diffusing statements such as, “This must be a difficult day for you. How can I help?” Reassure your client that anger is normal. Do not give advice unless you are asked; sometimes, just silence allows the client to express him/herself, escalate, and then calm down without any intervention from the volunteer.
- If applicable, suggest stress-reducers like outdoor walks, deep breathing exercises, meditation or prayer, tai chi, yoga, or setting time aside to listening quietly to soothing music. Phrase the suggestion as, “This has helped me in the past when I felt frustrated and overwhelmed...”

Feelings of helplessness

- Encourage your client to talk about what is making him/her feel helpless. There may be independent living aids that could alleviate the problem. Knowing your client’s limitations will give you insight into how you can help.
- Help your client arrange the house so that he/she can do as much as possible independently. For example, clearing out clutter can help your client feel less overwhelmed and more in control of his/her environment.
- Show your client that he/she is not helpless. During visits, ask your client to help with activities as much as possible. Encourage your client to make decisions. Ask for his/her opinions frequently, and show appreciation for the input.
- Show your client that he/she is valued. Talk with your client and help him/her see where he/she continues to have a positive impact on loved ones. Look into activities that you and your client can do together for a good cause (e.g. crafts projects that can be donated to the local senior center or school for fundraising; volunteering activities).
- Recognize and accept that some things are out of our control; instead, focus on your client’s strengths and do activities he/she can still enjoy.

***Remember: If you are worried about your client, always tell your supervisor!
If counseling is needed, clients should be referred to a professional.***

Sources: Legacy Caregiver Services, (2006). The Caregiver Helpbook: Powerful Tools for Caregivers. 2nd ed.: Legacy Health System. National Senior Corps Association: www.nscatogether.org

Reflection: Respecting Boundaries



Be prepared for the possibility that your client may have very different values and priorities. For example, you may take very good care of yourself but your client smokes like a chimney and eats food that is bad for his/her health. Your home is as well-organized as Martha Stewart's, but your client has not cleared anything out since 1972!

1. Think about a client or another person in your life that you would like to help. If you were to suggest a change or idea that might improve this person's quality of life, what would that change be?

2. How would you approach that person to make the suggestion? What would you say?

You may have questions about what is appropriate to suggest or offer to improve the quality of life for your client, or you may find yourself in an ethical dilemma (e.g. the client asks you to keep a secret, but you are concerned for his/her welfare if he/she doesn't get help).

Always ask your supervisor if you are unsure!

3. Today, do you have a question about appropriate volunteer-client boundaries? (Share it during the discussion today or approach your supervisor later.)

Is it okay to...

Additional Resources: Helping Clients Improve Quality of Life

Are you interested in learning more about the topics covered in this workshop? You may find the following online resources helpful. References consulted for this module are also included in this handout.

U.S. National Institutes of Health National Institute on Aging (NIA) provides health information for seniors in English and Spanish: <http://www.nia.nih.gov/>.

Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging is a manual and companion video that guides older adults through safe and effective endurance, strength training, balance, and flexibility exercises. The 80-page manual is available online for free, or may be ordered along with the video for a fee: <http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide/>.

Good Nutrition: It's a Way of Life from the NIA's "Age Page" series for seniors provides practical advice for maintaining good nutrition, including recommended calories, food safety, and shopping tips: <http://www.niapublications.org/agepages/nutrition.asp>.

Samaritan Health Services provides accessible, easy to read health information and tips for wellness on a variety of topics. The website includes a section for older adult health concerns:

<http://samhealth.staywellsolutionsonline.com/YourFamily/OlderAdults/>

The **Eldercare Locator** is a national toll-free directory assistance service provided by the U.S. Administration on Aging. Eldercare Locator helps people locate aging services in every community throughout the U.S. Call 1-800-677-1116 or visit their website: <http://www.eldercare.gov>.

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Training Feedback Survey

Please help us improve our training sessions by providing feedback on the training you attended. Thank you!

Training/Session Name: _____ Date: _____

Lead Facilitator: _____

Program you serve with: SCP RSVP Other: _____

Please rate this session using the following scale:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5
1. The subject matter was presented effectively.					
2. The facilitator was knowledgeable.					
3. The facilitator responded to questions.					
4. There were enough opportunities for discussion.					
5. The written materials are useful.					
6. The session met my expectations.					
7. As a result of this training, I gained new knowledge applicable to my volunteer assignment.					
8. I plan to apply what I learned at this session.					

9. What did you like best about this session?

10. What would have improved this session?

Thank You! Your feedback will help us to improve our training!