SAPPHIRE MODULE

Normal Aging

Why do we use the Gems?

The Senior Gems® are based on the Allen Cognitive Disability Theory. Each gem represents a stage of dementia from normal aging through late-stage dementia. We use the gems to help us understand the changes that are taking place and to know what our clients are still able to do in order to provide the best care possible.

Dear Learner,

This training guide was designed for you to complete as a self-study activity. Please do the following in order to ensure successful completion:

- First, read through EVERYTHING. There is a lot of important information throughout the guide. If you find something that will be helpful to you and your clients, underline or highlight that information.
- If you have a question, please ask: ________________________
- Once you are finished, take the quiz at the end and review these answers with your supervisor. You will need to answer eight out of 10 questions correctly to pass.
- The packet will be yours to keep, but you must turn the quiz in to your supervisor.
  - Due Date: ____________

Taking the time to complete these learning guides show that you care about your clients and want to provide the best service possible. Thank you for your hard work and dedication!
Caregivers completing this learning guide will be able to identify changes that occur due to normal aging, changes that are *not* normal, and how activities and routines can be adjusted to meet the changing needs of older adults.

**Characteristics of Sapphire**

On the Gems scale, Sapphire represents normal aging.

- A sapphire does not have dementia; sapphires represent normal aging.
- They may have forgetfulness and difficulty learning new things, however they CAN learn new habits.
- Sometimes they may feel blue or down as they cope with aging.
- Sapphires want to have choices.

**What is Normal Aging?**

Think of normal aging like you might think of a car: a new car runs smoothly with almost no maintenance and repair. As time goes on, however, repairs are needed to maintain function. A time comes when the parts are wearing out more than you can fix and replace them and eventually, some of the parts have less of an ability to function. It doesn’t mean the car doesn’t work, it just means you might have to change what you’re doing. For example, you might need to add oil more frequently or give it time to warm up on a cold day.
Decrease in physical strength, endurance, and flexibility—as muscles are used less, they don’t work as well.

Decline in efficiency of bodily organs—for example, the heart begins to require more oxygen to do the same amount of work.

Loss of bone mass—bones begin to thin and shrink. Average height loss for most people is two inches by age 80! Jaws also shrink, which is why denture fitting can be troublesome.

Slower reflexes—reaction time slows because of changes in the central nervous system. This is one reason why driving becomes an issue as you age.

Decline in senses—read on for more information about our senses and how they change with age.

Taking longer to return to equilibrium—the body begins to take longer to return to balance after a stress (such as a fall).
Did you know?
As you grow older you lose pigment in your skin. This causes you to burn more easily. Make sure, when caring for a client and going outside, you remind them to use suntan lotion!

Changes in Brain Function
It’s important to know that intelligence stays intact with age; in fact some people may find that it improves! There are some things; however that do change as you age:

- Normally aging people can still learn new things, it just may take a little longer.
- Recalling information, especially recent information can take a little longer.
- The ability to handle information from many sources at one time may decrease.

So, what can caregivers do to help their clients with these subtle changes in memory?

- Your client may prefer not to be in large social settings because of all of the new information coming at them one at a time
- Keep lists
- Follow a daily routine
- Help them to keep important items, such as keys, in the same place all of the time
- Keep a detailed calendar
- When people are being introduced, repeat names
- Keep their mind and body busy!

It is important to remember that occasional forgetfulness or difficulty recalling information does not mean your client has Alzheimer’s or dementia. But you should be aware of the difference between Alzheimer’s and dementia and normal aging. The next section will give you some information on that topic.

Want to test your memory? If you have access to the internet, try this memory test:

http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/stm0.html
### Comparing Alzheimer’s and Dementia with Normal Aging

- Alzheimer’s is a disease. It is the most common cause of dementia. It is estimated that somewhere between 2.4 and 5.1 million people have Alzheimer’s.
- Dementia refers to a group of symptoms such as: confusion, disorientation, memory loss, and behavior changes that characterize certain diseases and conditions.
- Some forms of dementia are very treatable, if you suspect something is going on, alert your supervisor immediately!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal Aging</th>
<th>Alzheimer’s and Dementia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Continues to be independent in daily activities</td>
<td>- Person becomes critically dependent on others for key independent-living activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- May complain of memory loss, but is still able to provide considerable details about incidents of forgetfulness</td>
<td>- Will only complain of memory problems if specifically asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Occasional word finding difficulties</td>
<td>- Memory problems worsen with time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does not get lost in familiar areas</td>
<td>- Notable decline in memory for recent events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Able to operate common appliances</td>
<td>- Frequent word-finding pauses and substitutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Maintains prior level of social skills</td>
<td>- Gets lost in familiar areas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Older adults often tell stories from their past, can you think of a story you’ve been told that really stuck with you?

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________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________

Try using activities that exercise the mind! Good activities to try:
Crossword puzzles, Sudoku, Board Games and Card Games!
Social Changes due to Aging

Unfortunately, one of the hard truths about getting older is dealing with loss. Older people are often dealing with many different losses, and many at the same time. Examples of the types of loss they are dealing with: health, job, money, home and death of friends and family. All of these losses can sometimes lead to what is called “bereavement overload.” Their losses need to be recognized, and they should be given time to heal and grieve. Not taking the time to grieve from loss can lead to other problems.

Older adults often have two very important emotional needs: Having a sense of control and being involved in decisions. As a caregiver, you should encourage your clients to make their wishes clear and share their point of view. For example asking simple questions like “what would you like for dinner?” instead of “I’m going to make chicken for dinner” can make the senior feel like they still have control over decisions in their life. Finally, it’s important for caregivers and family alike to recognize that change can be uncomfortable for older adults.

What impacts how you will age?

Remember, not everyone ages the exact same way. Some important factors that influence how you age are: Genetics, Lifestyle, Nutrition and Medical Care. For examples, someone who has led a very active lifestyle will likely maintain greater strength and flexibility as they age.

Can you think of a time one of your clients suffered a loss? How did it impact them? What did you do to support them? Write down some of your thoughts here:

_____________________________________________
_____________________________________________
_____________________________________________
_____________________________________________
_____________________________________________
Normal aging causes changes in all five senses. Please review the chart below to understand what the changes are and how to adapt to those changes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense</th>
<th>Description of Change</th>
<th>Things you can do to help!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eyesight</td>
<td>• Loss of peripheral vision</td>
<td>• Ensure adequate lighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decreased ability to judge depth</td>
<td>• Allow time for eyes to adjust from light to dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Keep walkways clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>• Less ability to hear high pitched noises</td>
<td>• Sit at face level when talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Don’t cover your mouth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Don’t shout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Speak slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use visual cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reduce background noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage hearing checks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>• Decreased taste buds</td>
<td>• Watch salt and sugar consumption!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Decreased saliva production</td>
<td>• Encourage use of spices instead of salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Help maintain good oral hygiene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>• Decreased ability to smell</td>
<td>• Make sure smoke detectors are installed and have working batteries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• May cause decreased appetite, encourage eating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch</td>
<td>• Decreased sensitivity to touch</td>
<td>• Test water temperatures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Label hot/cold taps clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage close toed shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Check for injuries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age and Chronic Disease

Please be aware that many characteristics we associate with aging are actually the product of chronic disease and NOT normal aging. Chronic diseases are those diseases for which the patient is not going to be “cured”. The risks of these types of diseases increase with age. Statistics show that roughly 80% of older people have at least 1 chronic disease. These diseases can also magnify or speed up the normal aging process. Chronic diseases can make carrying out activities of daily living more difficult, and can cause the senior to feel isolated and depressed. The likelihood is that your client probably has at least 1 chronic disease.

Here is a list of the most common chronic diseases (and the percent of older people with that disease):

- Arthritis (49%)
- Hypertensions (37%)
- Hearing impairments (32%)
- Heart Disease (90%)
- Sinusitis (17%)
- Cataracts (17%)
- Orthopedic Impairments (16%)
- Diabetes (9%)
- Visual Impairments (9%)
- Tinnitus (ringing in the ears, 8%)
- Varicose veins (8%)

Which chronic diseases do the clients you serve most often deal with?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
If you notice any changes in your client’s health and abilities, contact your supervisor immediately.

Things that get better as you age:
- Wisdom
- Life Stories
- Attention Span
- Patience
- Resilience
- Common Sense
- Humor
- Vocabulary
- Expert Knowledge

Other things that get better with age:
- Cheese
- Wine
- Gardens
- Antiques
What can YOU do to help your clients?

As you’ll see if the next section, aging does not have to be looked at as something negative. In fact, many cultures embrace aging. Help your clients maintain the active and healthy lifestyles they’ve always had. Here are some ideas of how you can promote healthy aging:

- Activities! Keep your clients active. Depending on your client and their needs/abilities, an activity might be going for a walk, or it might be listening to music. Activities give your client purpose and something to look forward to. Exercise both the body and the brain.

- Encourage healthy eating habits and proper nutrition. For some clients this might mean watching the sugar intake, and for others it might be encouraging them to eat.

- Encourage good sleeping habits.

Best Practices

Always remember your clients deserve the respect that comes with having lived a long life. Never disrespect your clients by talking to them like a child.

What are activities you would like to continue to do as you age?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What are activities you like to do with your clients?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
India
The elderly are viewed as the ones with the right to control family wealth.

Latin America
Elderly are treated with the utmost respect and taken care of by younger generations.

Japan
Age is a representation of wisdom and authority.

Ways other societies view age:

How would you describe the typical American view towards age?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________  

What is your view of age?
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________  
_____________________________________________________________________________________
The Sapphire Module  
Senior Gems®

Home care is a very personal business that focuses on service to our clients. If we complete our daily tasks on time and with a smile, the client will feel like they have received good service.

Follow the four Customer C.A.R.E steps and ensure that each client receives Excellent Customer Service!

- **C**: Cheerful Greeting  
  It is important to come to work with a positive attitude. Greet the client warmly every time.

- **A**: Ask-Listen-Act  
  Ask the client if they have any specific needs or tasks that they would like you to do. Keep a balance between getting your work done on time and being flexible to respond to your client’s needs.

- **R**: Record Activities & Observations  
  Document information about your clients on the documentation log and note the tasks that are completed on each shift on the timesheet. If you see any major changes in the client call the office right away.

- **E**: End on a Positive Note  
  Ask the client if there is anything else you can do for them. Leave on a positive note by wishing your client a good day and telling them the next date and time you will see them.

If you follow these four steps each time you visit your clients you will be giving great customer service!
The Greatest Generation

Most of your clients will be members of the “Greatest Generation”. The Greatest Generation is made up of the people who preserved through the Great Depression and World War II. In order to communicate as effectively as possible, here are some facts about this generation:

- Values: personal responsibility, duty, honor, and faith.
- Their hard work created much of the wealth, freedom, and technological advancements we have today.
- Despite their many achievements, they are very humble.

Being able to communicate effectively with your clients is essential for their happiness and yours. Many of the topics we’ve discussed in this training guide will help you to improve your communication skills, but let’s go over a few points that might help you to improve:

1. Consider the characteristics of the “Greatest Generation,” think about what is important to them and what they value. For example, since they value personal responsibility, they are not going to like giving you control. Help them to maintain control of their lives.
2. Be aware of your assumptions about older adults. Be careful not to stereotype. For example, not all older adults are hearing impaired. Don’t assume you need to talk very loudly.
3. Listen and give them the opportunity to respond. Take the time to listen to what your client is telling you.
4. Don’t make all of the decisions! You can provide guidance and help, but allow them to maintain control.
The Sapphire Module
Senior Gems®

Quiz

The Sapphire Module: Normal Aging

Directions: Circle the best answer choice, and then check your answers with your supervisor.

1. When communicating with an older person, always speak in loud, simple sentences. Much like how you would speak to a young child.
   - True or False

2. Reaction times slows during normal aging due to changes in the central nervous system.
   - True or False

3. Which of the following does the “Greatest Generation” not value.
   - A. Faith
   - B. Hard work
   - C. Reliance on others
   - D. Personal responsibility

4. It is normal for an older person to get lost in their own home.
   - True or False

5. Which of the following factors influence how a person will age?
   - A. Genetics
   - B. Lifestyle
   - C. Nutrition
   - D. All of the above

6. Keeping lists and accurate calendars are helpful tools for anyone and especially our clients.
   - True or False

7. Activities are a good way to spend time with your client.
   - True or False

8. Older adults like those around them to make all decisions.
   - True or False

9. Changes occur to the 5 senses due to normal aging.
   - True or False

10. Getting older means your health is totally downhill. Nothing can improve.
    - True or False

Employee Name (Please Print):

_______________________________

Date: __________________________

I understand the information presented in this guide.

I have completed this guide and answered at least eight questions correctly.

Employee Signature:

_______________________________

Supervisor Signature:

_______________________________