



A Tip-Sheet to Help Seniors Emerge and Thrive

Please Note: This document is meant to be a tip-sheet to assist staff in helping seniors whose social skills may have become rusty during the pandemic.

The pandemic has changed our lives and possibly how we interact with others.

As we adjust to the new realities of the pandemic, we have an opportunity to support seniors in navigating social situations again after a year of isolation.

Seniors may be wondering how they will interact with others again, feel more comfortable, and safely enjoy social situations once more. For those seniors who are just emerging from isolation, feelings of social anxiety may run high. Seniors who have been quite lonely may return to social situations angry, irritable, tired, or sad. Others may be upbeat and welcome the opportunity to interact with others again.

Our goal is to help our seniors emerge and thrive.

This tip-sheet will build your awareness about seniors needing social skills assistance and provide you with some helpful ideas to share with them.

Signs of Lapsed Social Skills

- Not understanding the subtle aspects of social situations or how to behave
- Overreacting to things that others do
- Misinterpreting the intentions or expressions of others (e.g., thinking someone dislikes you or is angry at you because of the expression on their face)
- Choosing solitary activities over social activities

Helpful Tips to Share with Seniors on Regaining Social Skills

- Encourage seniors to take advantage of the structured social activities that the senior center or organization offers
- Use “open” body language when interacting with others
 - o Uncross your legs and arms
 - o Stand or sit up straight
 - o Turn towards people
 - o Relax your shoulders
 - o Smile
- Practice your listening skills by asking open-ended questions and paying attention to others when they speak
- Maintain communication with other people even if it feels awkward (e.g., block out time each day to make a phone call)
- Start out with situations that feel safer to you (e.g., interacting with people you used to know well)
- Make being friendly the most important thing since everyone is in the process of regaining social skills
- Be aware of your tone of voice
- Be aware of personal space. Give people you are speaking to enough room to feel comfortable and safe.
- Practice, practice, practice all these skills regularly
- Ask for help if you are unsure or need advice