

# Special Considerations of Aging Congregants

**F**aith leaders play a significant role in many of life's rites of passage. As you shepherd your congregation through each phase of life, it can be helpful to understand some of the common concerns and issues older adults face in their later years. There's no one-size-fits-all of what aging looks like. Many older adults thrive in their later years. However, there are some prevailing themes to be aware of.

## Memory Considerations

One common change that comes with aging is memory loss. This can be unsettling for people to experience, so it's important to acknowledge

and understand. Some memory loss, like walking into a room and forgetting why you were headed there, is perfectly normal. However, some changes, like putting keys in the refrigerator, might point to a more serious issue.

There are many activities and lifestyle adjustments that can improve memory function. Diet, exercise, stimulation and connecting with others are all important aspects of maintaining healthy mental function. Research has shown that incorporating some of these changes earlier rather than later can help postpone the onset of more serious issues.

*"It's important for older adults to be a part of a community and a contributing member of that community."*

Kathleen Spearman, Social Worker,  
Meadowlark

*"Everyone is different in their aging process, but we are all going to experience changes in our memory. Our ability to recall, remember and focus are all going to decrease as we age. That's a normal thing. Where we want to pay special consideration is when those difficulties or changes are atypical or interfere with daily function."*

Michelle Haub, Speech Language Pathologist and Leader for Special Programs,  
Meadowlark

## Isolation and Depression

Many aspects of normal life — sickness, physical impairment, loss of friends and family, changing roles (like becoming or needing a caretaker), relocation — can change as adults age. Each of these changes may create a feeling of loss or grief, which can lead to isolation or withdrawal. A sense of disconnection only exacerbates these challenges and may lead to depression.

Older adults can benefit from connecting with others through volunteer outreach, either as recipients of outreach or by volunteering themselves.

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## Financial Considerations

Financial health is about much more than a bank account balance. And estate planning encompasses many aspects of a person's life. Being organized and aware of a variety of monetary, legal and health assets and documentation can provide peace of mind. It's important to be able to answer several questions: Where are your bank accounts? Whose name is on them? Do you have a will? Do you have life or long-term care insurance policies? Where are your copies of those policies? Do you have a power of attorney? Do you have a funeral plan?

*"I help families navigate financial matters. 'Do you know what you own?' is a neutral question that sparks thinking about finances and putting affairs in order. That peace of mind is worth its weight in gold."*

Rita Harsch, Financial Counselor,  
Meadowlark

*"We get very tied to our surroundings. A lot of people have lived in their homes for decades. It could be a home they built themselves or a family home that goes back generations. Or they could have lost a spouse and the physical home houses those memories of them together. Putting yourself in their shoes can help you understand why they might not want to leave."*

Bridget Larkin, Social Services Leader, Meadowlark

## Aging in Place

Many older adults want to stay at home for as long as possible. It's important to understand that "home" is much more than a physical space. It can carry a lot of meaning. There's also a sense of independence and autonomy that's linked to home. While some people welcome the new possibilities that come with moving to a retirement community, others prefer to age in place. For those who opt to stay at home, the most important factor is safety. There are many in-home services to support those who age in place.

## Resources for Aging Adults

You and your volunteers are an important support system for this population. Even the simplest interaction – a phone call or

handwritten note – can be incredibly meaningful and can help open the door to more conversations. As you reach out, keep these considerations in mind.

Meadowlark provides many programs and services for the greater Manhattan community in addition to Meadowlark residents. These include home health services, memory care and Parkinson's programs (both of which have components for caregivers and affected adults), fitness services, rehabilitation care, outpatient therapy and our Passport program.

Meadowlark also offers presentations on financial planning and other topics. If your church, synagogue or other faith community would like to offer an outreach to your congregants, please contact us.