



Mental Health Services for Older Adults Q&A

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How to use this guide

Senior Law Day Collaborative Q&As are intended to guide older adults and caregivers as they address issues related to aging and planning for the future. We suggest you review this information in the full before seeking out an elder law attorney or other professional, so that you are familiar with the terms and can be ready to ask questions specific to your needs.

At our website – seniorlawday.info – you will find:

- additional Q&As for review and download
- a library of recorded webinars on topics relevant to elders and caregivers
- an opportunity to get your specific questions answered via email or during our quarterly consultation events
- notice up upcoming educational programs

All services of the Collaborative are offered at no charge. Our goal is to help you get the answers you need so you can plan and move forward with confidence.

*This Q&A is an excerpt from the 22nd edition of the **Elder Law Q&A: An Introduction to Aging Issues and Planning for the Future** written by Steven A. Schurkman Esq. and members of the Senior Law Day Collaborative.*

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Mental Health Services for Older Adults

As we age, we face transitions and challenges. Most of the time, we weather what comes our way without any difficulty. Sometimes, we can benefit from support and counseling but may be unsure where to go. We hope this section will provide you, or those you care about, with information and guidance.

Individuals may face losses and experience stress about daily events and changes they face. They may become anxious or sad. When older adults face difficulties that interfere with day to day activities, it is best to reach out for help. If you are an older adult, or a person who is caring for one, you should be aware that changes in your physical and/or emotional health could trigger symptoms related to anxiety, depression, or other mental disorders.

What types of difficulties do we face?

Although depression is not a part of normal aging, in older adults it causes distress and suffering and leads to impairments in physical, mental, and social functioning. Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses affecting older adults (approximately 15 out of every 100 adults over age 65 in the United States). Depression is characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, and loss of interest in activities lasting two weeks or longer. A change in mood can be accompanied by changes in sleep, appetite, energy, memory problems, confusion, withdrawal from social situations, and irritability. Depression often interferes with the person's ability to complete everyday tasks over a prolonged period of time.

The recognition of depression in the elderly can be challenging because many older adults have physical illnesses that trigger or co-exist with depression. Life events, such as the loss of a loved one, retirement, and/or a lack of a supportive social network can trigger depression. Often individuals miss the opportunity to seek help because they assume the symptoms are "expected." However, in reality these symptoms should not be expected and compromise your quality of life. Untreated depression does not go away and leads to increased doctor visits, hospitalizations, isolation, and mortality.

What are some signs that I may be depressed?

If you are experiencing feelings of exhaustion, helplessness, hopelessness, and changes in mood or interest in things you usually enjoy, you may be depressed. It is important for you to seek guidance from someone who can help decide what you need. It is difficult to take any action to

help yourself when depressed. Negative thinking and low mood are part of the depression and can keep individuals from seeking help. As you begin treatment, these feelings will go away.

What if I am uncomfortable talking to my doctor?

If you are uncomfortable talking with your doctor, there are other health care professionals to talk with. There are other health care professionals to talk with who specialize in this area, remain sensitive to your needs and feelings, and can help. A social worker/case manager, counselor, psychologist, advanced practice nurse, geriatric psychiatrist, or a mental health counselor are resources to help you identify the appropriate care.

Is there any treatment for depression or other mental health disorders?

There are several options available to help individuals reduce their pain and suffering caused by the symptoms of depression and other mental health disorders. These treatments include medications and psychotherapy (talk therapy). Your doctor may start your treatment with medication to address the depression on a biological level. It may take some trial and error to find the right dosage that works for you. Do not be discouraged during this period. In addition to medication, your doctor or mental health provider may recommend that you participate in psychotherapy. In a safe environment, psychotherapy will often help you to cope with your feelings and help change some of the patterns in your life that may contribute to the illness.

What are some of the barriers to seeking treatment?

People who are experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety worry about how they will be perceived if other family members or friends find out they have this diagnosis. Feelings of shame and self-doubt can result in the person isolating themselves from others. Often the fear of being treated differently causes individuals to delay seeking treatment, or even talking to others. Another common misconception is that insurance will not cover the cost of treatment. In fact, most insurance companies will adequately cover the cost of both medication and a variety of treatment modalities. In addition, lack of accessibility to the mental health treatment facility is another barrier to treatment. Though, solutions can be found to provide transportation, scheduling options and/or remote visits, to name a few.

If you are experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety, remember to contact your doctor or a mental health professional. Options for help from professionals who specialize in working with older adults are listed below.

Weill Cornell Institute of Geriatric Psychiatry/New York Presbyterian Hospital

(across from The Westchester Mall in White Plains and in New York City on 61st Street and York Avenue)

Since 1994, the Weill Cornell Institute of Geriatric Psychiatry in White Plains has been a center of state-of-the-art care for older adults with depression. They provide psychotherapy services through participation in research programs. All of their studies seek to produce knowledge and share programs that reduce the burden of depression and disability in older adults, many of whom have limited access to good care. Eligible individuals who participate in their studies receive free transportation and free treatment with talk therapy. Through their studies, they seek to promote excellence in care for older adults with depression.

For a free screening for depression or more information, please contact the Weill Cornell Institute of Geriatric Psychiatry at (914) 997-5238.

psychiatry.weill.cornell.edu/weill-cornell-institute-geriatric-psychiatry

Family Services of Westchester, Inc. (FSW)

FSW is a private, non-profit, mental health and social service organization serving Westchester County since 1954. FSW has more than 55 years of experience providing licensed mental health services to older adults. In addition to geriatric mental health services, FSW offers a comprehensive range of both community-based and residential Elder Services to help Westchester's older residents maintain their highest possible level of independence in the community. A broad variety of services are provided to meet the needs of older adults and enhance their quality of life at whatever level they are functioning.

To schedule an appointment or consultation, please call the main FSW number at (914) 668-9124, Ext. 22.

For information regarding Geriatric Mental Health Services:

fsw.org/our-programs/older-adults/gatekeeper-and-pioap

Westchester Jewish Community Services (WJCS)

The Geriatric Mental Health Service at WJCS provides specialized counseling services to adults 55 and over (and their families) utilizing a variety of modalities, including individual, family and group treatments, psychiatric assessment and medication monitoring. Evidence based practices, including cognitive behavioral therapy and problem solving treatment, address issues of aging, loss, disability, and changes in the family that can trigger anxiety and depression. Older adults recovering after discharge from psychiatric hospitalization also receive continuing treatment in an outpatient setting through their service.

For more information or to apply for WJCS services, contact Leslie Hernandez, Director of Admitting at (914) 737-7338 Ext. 3119

Phelps Memorial Hospital Center

Phelps Memorial Hospital Center has 238-beds and is a non-profit, acute care community hospital in Westchester County. Through their Senior Health and Internal Medicine Practice, The Phelps Memorial Hospital Center offers adult and geriatric primary care, including memory loss and depression screenings. The hospital also has an outpatient service called the Phelps Counseling Service that provides assessments, treatment, and support groups run by board certified psychiatrists, nurse practitioners and licensed clinical social workers.

To schedule an evaluation, please call (914) 366-3600

phelps.northwell.edu/psychiatry-counseling

St. Vincent's Hospital Westchester

St. Vincent's Hospital in Westchester is one of the largest providers of mental health counseling in the Westchester area. The Geriatric Inpatient Program at St. Vincent's Hospital offers a therapeutic environment for older adults aimed at promoting safety, mental health and physical well-being for adults suffering from psychiatric disorders.

To schedule an evaluation or refer a client, please call the Evaluation and Referral Service at (855) 239-0019

saintjosephs.org/locations/st.-vincent-s-hospital-westchester

The Mental Health Association of Westchester County, Inc. (MHA)

The Mental Health Association of Westchester County, Inc. offers clinic services to individuals of all ages, including older adults. Clinics are located in multiple locations throughout Westchester and Rockland Counties.

MHA's website offers a full description of services and locations:

mhawestchester.org

Individuals wishing to schedule an appointment at a convenient location can contact their Central Scheduler at (914) 345-0700

In the event of a behavioral health emergency, you can call:

- Crisis Prevention and Response Team at (914) 925-5959
- National Suicide Hotline (800) 273-TALK or (800) 273-8255
- NYS Substance Abuse HOPEline at (877) 8-HOPENY / Text 467369
- Or, you can always call 911 in any emergency