



SENIORS COUNT NEIGHBORS CARE

VOLUNTEER SERVICE DESCRIPTION

Seniors Count is supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its Community Partnerships for Older Adults (CFOA) national initiative.

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Qualifications

- A. The essential characteristic for a volunteer is a desire to be involved in a mutually satisfying relationship of friendship and assistance with an elderly person.
- B. The volunteer needs to be able to work independently and comfortably in a one-to-one relationship.

Responsibilities

- A. Perform specific agreed upon tasks to meet the particular needs of the elderly person. These may include: visiting, shopping for or with the elder, writing letters or reading to the sight impaired, accompanying to medical appointments, telephone visits, taking walks, assisting with minor tasks around the home, and so forth.
- B. Act as an advocate and/or encourage elders to advocate for themselves. There may be times when you are able to initiate referrals on behalf of the elder to other sources of assistance in the community.
- C. Report on a regular basis to the Seniors Count Volunteer Coordinator.
- D. Participate in orientation and attend as many other meetings and social events as possible.
- E. Submit monthly reports, oral or in writing, of time spent with elderly person, including travel and phone time.

Time Commitment

- A. Time required for orientation is approximately 1 hour.
- B. The recommended time commitment for being a volunteer is one year with a minimum of an hour with an average weekly visit to the elderly person. What is done for or with the individual may, of course, influence the amount of time you spend together.
- C. The Coordinator can help make arrangements for substitutes when time off is needed due to illness, unexpected absence or vacation plans.

Benefits

- A. Having access to and being a valued member of an important team working together in good faith and good will for the elderly members of our communities.
- B. Opportunity for life enrichment through involvement with an older person.
- C. The privilege and satisfaction that comes from serving others.

** Please note: A criminal record and motor vehicle release is required.

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CONFIDENTIALITY

Protecting the Privacy of Those We Serve

The Seniors Count Initiative depends upon a climate of mutual caring and trust. To promote the trust between the volunteer and the older person, we must make proper use of the personal information we are given, as well as being careful not to needlessly discuss the situations we find in their homes and their lives.

When someone asks for assistance, personal details are often shared. Medical problems, family circumstances, and age can be sources of embarrassment to many people. Also, as volunteers go into people's homes, they observe their lifestyles, belongings, abilities, disabilities, and family situations- all of which are private.

In order to maintain the trust demonstrated by their request for assistance, we must strive to guard the dignity and privacy of everyone we serve. Personal information should not be shared unless absolutely necessary to better meet their needs – and then, only with the Seniors Count Staff.

A GUIDE FOR VOLUNTEER VISITORS

OBJECTIVE

Our objective is to visit elderly persons in their homes to demonstrate that they are valued members of our communities; not alone and forgotten; and to express sincere interest, friendliness, and a willingness to help.

WHAT A VISITOR DOES

1. Visit the person once a week. Be faithful, do your best not to disappoint the folks you are visiting – call and explain when you cannot be there.
2. Plan your visits. Select the time for coming to suit the person being visited and your schedule. Do the best you can to stick to a schedule. Generally, it's a good idea to call before you visit.
3. Make friendly visits; be a caring companion. Visit because you enjoy it.
4. Be a good listener. Remember that the homebound and isolated often have few people to talk to. They need to do the talking. Listen patiently, be objective, and project understanding helpfulness and respect for them as human beings.
5. Be alert to any special medical or financial concerns of the person you visit. Notify the Coordinator about it. Sometimes she/he can make helpful referrals to appropriate agencies.
6. Keep all confidences. Do not talk to others about what you hear or see. You must be trustworthy and discreet.
7. Treat your elderly companion with courtesy, care, consideration, and compassion. Delight in their hidden treasure, wisdom, and life experience.

WHAT A VISITOR DOES NOT DO

1. Do not patronize. The elderly person is a mature adult and needs to be treated as a friend and equal.
2. Do not make promises that you cannot or will not keep. You may never know how much your visit might have meant. Have a set date for your visit. If it can't be kept, try to select another day, but always inform your visatee. If you can't come or must discontinue coming, tell the visatee why, otherwise he may think he is at fault and has done something to offend you.
3. Do not give advice. If your opinion is asked, exercise sensitivity and thoughtfulness in your response – remember that to be asked implies a certain trust on the part of your elderly companion.
4. Do not pity. Be sympathetic, but don't encourage self-pity.
5. Do not monopolize the conversation. You aren't there to pour out your life story or circumstances, but to be a friendly visitor and companion. As time goes on and your relationship develops, you may find yourself sharing more – but don't force it; allow the rapport to unfold like a flower.
6. Do not dwell on unpleasant events. They will come up, but tactfully change the subject if it seems reasonable to do so.
7. A visitor will not do the following tasks:
 - ∞ Become involved in any cash transactions, any real estate matters, or disposal of real property of clients;
 - ∞ Accept cash and/or gifts from the clients;
 - ∞ Perform duties usually assigned to a doctor or nurse;
 - ∞ Perform duties usually assigned to a professional Social Worker or Case Worker;
 - ∞ Perform personal care tasks for clients including bathing or toileting;
 - ∞ Perform custodial services normally performed by paid staff;
 - ∞ Deposit cash in banks for clients;
 - ∞ Do major household repairs and maintenance tasks for clients;
 - ∞ Wash windows, mow lawns, move furniture, and lift heavy objects, including filled garbage cans;
 - ∞ Do major cleaning of a house or apartment;
 - ∞ Do extensive shopping for a client;
 - ∞ Perform any duty which the S.C. volunteer believes would be harmful to his or her own person or that of the client;
 - ∞ Work with clients who exhibit extremely difficult, unruly, violent, or dangerous behaviors.

THE VOLUNTEER AS A GATEKEEPER

An important role of the volunteer is that of gatekeeper. The gatekeeper recognizes significant changes in a person's behavior, and reports those changes to the Volunteer Coordinator so they may be referred to the appropriate resource. Issues of concern would be a dramatic or unusual change to a person's:

1. **Personal Appearance**
 - a. Unkempt appearance, hair not combed, clothes dirty.
2. **Home Conditions**
 - a. Exterior and/or interior in poor repair.
 - b. Little or no food.
 - c. Strong odors.
 - d. Uncared for pets.
 - e. Many empty alcohol containers.
3. **Orientation and Ability to Communicate**
 - a. Confused
 - b. Disoriented
 - c. Inappropriate responses
 - d. Forgetfulness
 - e. Repetitiveness while talking
4. **Emotional Health or Depressed State**
 - a. Dejected – states “I don't care, no use going on.”
 - b. Complains of not eating or sleeping
 - c. Appears anxious, fidgety
 - d. Anger and hostility directed at self, you, or another
 - e. Recent loss through death or relative/friend
 - f. Loss of pet(s)
5. **Substance Abuse**
 - a. Alcohol
 - b. Other drugs or medications
6. **Physical Losses**
 - a. Loss of hearing, sight, ambulation
7. **Economic and Social Status**
 - a. Unpaid financial obligations
 - b. Confusion about money
 - c. Unable to go outside to shop
 - d. Lack of social relationships
 - e. No mention of family or friends
 - f. May state “no one cares”

ACTIVE LISTENING/REMINISCENCE

- ∞ Establish trust. Be honest, non-judgmental and honor confidences.
- ∞ Accept expressions of anger, frustration, hostility, even hatred. Remember that they are not deeds. Consider how you might feel if faced with the same burdens, challenges, and losses your elder companion faces.
- ∞ Remember your demeanor. Look the speaker in the eye. Establish a calm and receptive atmosphere by being relaxed, unhurried, and attentive.
- ∞ Respond to what the speaker seems to be feeling. Facial expressions, voice tone, and pitch provide clues. Body language is revealing, and may be at odds with what is being said.
- ∞ Remember that your role as listener does not extend to problem-solving. You are not the Fixit person. As a volunteer caregiver, it can be a fine line. It's good to keep in mind what our boundaries and responsibilities are.
- ∞ Ask relevant questions when the elder is reminiscing. Be careful not to interrupt or break the concentration of the speaker.
- ∞ Be aware of sensitive topics and careful not to pressure folks to speak about anything that seems to cause discomfort for them.
- ∞ Remember that reminiscence can be expressed through drawing, writing, tape recorded autobiography (oral history), free-flowing non-directed conversation, directed conversations with someone else, or silently.
- ∞ Suggested approaches in the beginning:
 - What would you describe as the happiest day in your life and why?
 - Tell me about a happy memory from your childhood.
 - Can you tell me about your first (plane ride, date, day of school)?
 - What did you do for work and what did you most like about it?
 - What do you enjoy during your spare time?
 - Tell me about a past accomplishment of which you are particularly proud.
 - Tell me about a home or place you once lived... the place you like most and why.
 - Please tell me about someone whom you once thought of as a best friend and some of the good times you shared.
 - What was the most exciting moment in history you remember, or the most memorable or special events in your life?
- ∞ Encourage reminiscence that re-establishes a sense of identity; e.g., past occupations, activities, hobbies, and accomplishments.
- ∞ Use catalysts to bring back memories: e.g., trace the family tree, use photos, scrapbooks, old clothes, letters and miscellaneous memorabilia. Note the items in the person's immediate environment – they can be good jumping off points for talking about things that are important or dear to the elder.
- ∞ Topics that may evoke memories/stories: the Depression, the Model T Ford, early school days, how leisure time was spent, military service, farm life and chores, seasonal memories, family traditions, and so forth.
- ∞ Understand the importance of reminiscence to the elder's feelings of self-worth and accomplishment.
- ∞ Remember that years of living means that experience, wisdom, and judgment accrues. Recognition and respect for a job well done is important to us all.

VISUAL CHANGES WITH AGING

1. When visiting someone who is severely visually impaired; identify yourself when entering the room and tell them when you are leaving.
2. Speak directly to the visually impaired person; there's no need to use a spouse or companion as an interpreter.
3. Speak slowly, clearly, and distinctly.
4. Inform the elderly person simply and calmly of what you plan to do. If transportation is involved, make sure you allow adequate time for all aspects of the trip.
5. Remember that visual acuity may vary in some individuals from day to day, or with the time of day. Thus tasks performed well at one time may be difficult at another time.
6. Encourage elders to use their remaining vision to the fullest extent possible.
7. Stimulate other senses: touch, sound, and smell.
8. The following helpful items may be considered: a battery-operated radio, clocks that chime, large calendars, contrasting colors, talking books, large print books, magazines, playing cards, and special dials for telephones which enlarge the numbers and glow in the dark.
9. Be aware of safety hazards, such as partially open doors, cluttered floors, stairs, hallways, open cupboard doors and drawers, chairs not tight against table, scatter rugs, electrical cords, and so forth. Most of these potential hazards can be remedied without a lot of effort or expense.
10. Do not move furniture or belongings around unless asked to do so.
11. Older people sometimes neglect to keep eyeglasses clean. A gentle reminder or assistance in this task can be helpful. Also, assist as necessary to locate glasses, and encourage their use.
12. Make certain that lighting is adequate and evenly distributed, if appropriate and needed.

HEARING CHANGES WITH AGING

- ∞ If possible, ask the family about the best way to communicate.
- ∞ Approach from a visible direction as the elderly person may not hear you coming.
- ∞ Speak face to face at, or just below eye level.
- ∞ Use simple, direct phrases. For example, “Here is your mail.”
- ∞ Speak clearly and maintain your speaking volume. Many times, we drop the volume at the end of the sentence or phrase. The emotional content of what is being said can also influence the volume – be aware of staying consistent. Comments made “under your breath” may be expressive – but missed, confusing, or frustrating for the elderly person.
- ∞ Don’t assume that the hearing-impaired person is listening “selectively”. Hearing is complex – and includes factors such as interest in what is being said, ambient noise in the environment, state of health (head cold), and the overall quality and clarity of the visitor’s speech.
- ∞ Avoid chewing gum, smoking, eating, covering your mouth, or looking around the room while speaking. While dangling or sparkly jewelry is fun, it has the possibility of being visually distracting, thus breaking the eye contact that may be helpful to the elderly person. The same goes for talking “with your hands.” Good common sense will guide you.
- ∞ Visual aids may be used to augment verbal exchanges.
- ∞ Be aware that communication may take a little longer. Be patient and remember that you are getting to know each other and you will learn what is needed for good, clear communication.
- ∞ Be familiar with devices available to the hearing impaired:
 - Hearing Aids
 - Flashing lights which substitute for sound systems of fire alarms, telephones, etc.
 - Television attachments that increase the volume without disturbing others.
 - Telephone amplification devices available through local telephone companies.
 - Television adapters for “closed caption” programs.

MEMORY AIDS

First recognize that we all have memory problems. Stress, illness, medications, and depression can affect our memory performance at any age. We ignore our lapses of memory or laugh them off until we grow older; then it is regarded as a sign of aging.

You can help improve memory skills by tactfully making some suggestions to the person you are visiting and by showing – with your own examples – techniques you use to retain information.

Memory Approaches That The Volunteer May Use

1. Give people time to recall and draw some associations for them: for example, “The man who always brought us candy, drove that red Chevy, and had a black dog named Grease Pit.” Be careful not to “quiz” the person.
2. Present small amounts of new information at a time, rather than pressing a lot of information all at once.
3. Be sensitive and recognize when people are tired, sick, or tense – and avoid taxing their memory.

The memory tools and exercises below can be helpful to both volunteer and visitees.

Memory Tools

1. Carry a pad and pencil and make notes to yourself.
2. Use a large calendar or appointment book to record dates, daily events, and future plans or appointments.
3. If you are under a doctor’s care, ask the doctor to write down instructions.
4. Use a photo album diary, journal, or scrapbook to collect and record events you want to remember.
5. Use a tape recorder to leave reminder messages.

Memory Exercises

1. Use mnemonic devices (make associations between names and other images, the person’s interest, or the occasion) to help you remember information.
2. Do crossword puzzles, play scrabble or other games that jog your memory.
3. Review photo albums, diaries, and calendar events on a regular basis. Have photos out and visible.

HOME SAFETY CHECKLIST

This checklist is to increase your awareness of hazards and accidents “waiting to happen”. For the frail, elderly person, it is especially important to ensure that the home and immediate surroundings are safe and as risk-free as possible. These are all practical concerns and for the most part can be easily determined by observation.

1. Are there sturdy hand rails or banisters by all steps and stairs?
2. Is there adequate lighting in all stairs and hallways?
3. Is there a light switch at both the top and bottom of stairs?
4. Are stairways and hallways clear of clutter and loose objects?
5. Is there a flashlight, light switch, or lamp beside the bed?
6. Is there a light switch by the doorway of each room?
7. Are all electric cords placed close to walls, out of pathway?
8. Are rugs secured around all edges? (Not unraveling)
9. Are rugs smooth and flat, with no folds or wrinkles?
10. Are there non-skid mats under small/scatter rugs?
11. Is there a list of emergency phone numbers by the phone?
12. Are all medicines marked clearly? Name of medication, date purchased, how and when to be taken.
13. Is there a non-skid surface on the floor of bathtub or shower? Non-skid strips, flowers, rubber bath mat.
14. Are there adequate hand holds for getting in and out of the shower?
15. Is there a long-handled sponge mop easily accessible for cleaning up spills?
16. Are heat controls on the stove clearly marked and easy to read?
17. Any evidence of frayed wires, flickering lights, water leaking or dripping near wires or electrical outlets?
18. If there's a gas stove, are pilots lit and does flame appear quickly when turned on? Note any gas odor(s).

We realize that this list is not comprehensive. Also, some items refer to areas where you may not be visiting, i.e. bathroom, bedroom. Further, there is a fine line between what we observe, and what we can suggest to remedy possible hazardous situations.

However, considering the very serious possible consequence of accidents or falls to our elderly friends, it is important to be alert for hazardous conditions.

If you have serious concerns, please report them to the Seniors Count Volunteer Coordinator.

GUIDELINES FOR SHOPPING

Put yourself in the Senior's place. People are reluctant to ask for help. Shoppers need to make the Senior comfortable. The following guidelines will ease any awkward moments during initial contacts between the shopper and the Senior, and will help reduce volunteer "burnout".

- ∞ Encourage a specific day for shopping. Call you Senior the day before your appointed shopping date to confirm plans, as well as calling again right before you leave home.
- ∞ Be sure that your Senior makes a shopping list for you that include brand names and size. Review this list thoroughly, anticipate problems and ask any questions you have before you leave for the store.
- ∞ Ask your Senior what to do if the preferred item is not in stock. Should you buy another brand or omit that item from the list? Expect to make an occasional mistake, and don't worry about it if you have done your best.
- ∞ Find out if economy is important. If you notice a less expensive brand than the one specified, does your Senior want you to buy it instead?
- ∞ Volunteers should never take a recipient's credit card. If the person has developed an indifference to food and good nutrition, diplomatically suggest ideas and menus that incorporate tasty, nutritious foods and recipes.
- ∞ If the Senior indicates that some help would be appreciated, assist with unpacking and storing purchases.
- ∞ Your visit with your Senior is every bit as important to the well-being of the Senior as the food. If time permits, plan to spend a short time chatting.
- ∞ Verify the next shopping date. Avoid saying that you are "on call" as needed. Why? The Senior may be embarrassed, may not want to bother you, or may lose your number. Another possibility is that your Senior may be tempted to call you more often than you wish.

GUIDELINES FOR VOLUNTEER DRIVERS

The following guidelines and suggestions are for those volunteers who provide transportation to our recipients for shopping trips, errands, a ride in the country, and other needs.

1. A copy of your driver's license and of your automobile insurance information must be on file in the Seniors Count office.
2. Vehicles should be clean and **MUST** be in safe operating condition.
3. Volunteers have the right to accept or deny certain requests made of them by Seniors Count staff. However, accepting a request to provide a ride for someone requires volunteers to be responsible for on-time service and follow through of the assignment.
4. Volunteers will obey all traffic laws.
5. Insist on the use of all available seat belts.
6. Offer assistance as needed to enter and exit the car. Seniors Count does not expect volunteers to provide specialized care of passengers such as lifting. Passengers in a wheelchair must be able to transfer themselves from the wheelchair to the vehicle with no assistance or provide an attendant to assist them. If more assistance is needed than you feel comfortable providing, please call the Seniors Care office and let us know.
7. It is of paramount importance that volunteers value safety and employ safe driving techniques. **SAFETY FIRST**...allow plenty of time to drive and arrive safely. Homebound elders generally move slowly.
8. Seniors Count maintains an alcohol and drug-free policy. Volunteers must never drive if alcohol or other mood altering drugs have been taken. Never drive when tired or taking medication that causes drowsiness.
9. **Every accident, no matter how minor, must be reported, even if there is no apparent damage. Reports must be made immediately to the program coordinator.**
10. Feel free to set limits on the amount of transportation you will provide. Occasionally people who have been getting out very infrequently may want to do more than you wish to do.

Emergency Procedures

It is wise to be prepared for the unexpected! Emergencies may arise and will require good judgment on your part. The following guidelines are intended to help you in the event of an emergency.

Accidents:

- ∞ Volunteers must never leave the scene of an accident.
- ∞ Every accident, no matter how minor, must be reported, even if there is no apparent damage. Reports must be made immediately to the program coordinator. Document names of passengers, time, and what happened so no details are forgotten. Remain calm. Follow state rules for reporting accidents to authorities and your insurance agent.
- ∞ In the event of serious accident, wait for an ambulance to arrive. Do not attempt to move or administer first aid unless the situation is life threatening to your passenger.
- ∞ Do not make statements about fault to anyone except the police or the program coordinator.

Bad Weather:

- ∞ Volunteers should never feel obligated to drive if the roads are hazardous or foul weather threatens driver or passenger safety.
- ∞ If weather conditions require you to seek safety, do so immediately. Passengers may not like having to wait out a storm; but you, the driver, must consider safety first.
- ∞ We recommend that volunteer carry a first aid and/or safety survival kit in their car.

Illnesses:

Participants in Seniors Count often have existing medical conditions, and we make every attempt to let you know what they are. Nevertheless, emergencies may arise, so be prepared.

If your Senior becomes ill, stay calm and get to the nearest phone and contact 911 for emergency medical service.

Passengers who communicate distress should not be ignored.

Knowing symptoms and basic first aid steps will help you stay calm.

GIFTS AND GRATUITIES

There is no charge for the services of Seniors Count. Volunteers do not expect, and should not accept personal gifts, money, etc. We recognize, however, that it may be important for the service recipient to express appreciation. Occasional gifts of no monetary value may be exchanged or accepted: a plate of holiday cookies, for example, may be graciously accepted by a volunteer. Service recipients or their families may make financial contributions to the program. If in doubt, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

TERMINATION OF ASSIGNMENT

Termination of a volunteer/participant match should be done in a thoughtful and professional manner that promotes positive feelings for all concerned. The following procedures are recommended:

1. A decision to terminate the match, by either party, will be reported to the program coordinator as soon as possible. If the recipient is reluctant to take that step, the volunteer should inform the coordinator and state the reasons for the decision.
2. Depending on the situation, various steps will be taken.
 - A. Recipient is moving out of area.
 - ∞ An appropriate farewell note is sent from the program.
 - ∞ The coordinator will speak with the volunteer to review the concluded match and consider a new assignment.
 - B. Volunteer is moving out of area:
 - ∞ The volunteer should explain the departure to the recipient in time to allow for at least two more visits.
 - ∞ The coordinator may contact the recipient to discuss his/her interest in another volunteer.
 - C. There is dissatisfaction on the part of either person:
 - ∞ The coordinator will contact each to determine the reasons and assure both of support for the other choices.
 - ∞ Documentation of difficulty and resolution will be on file.
 - D. Recipient moves into a nursing home or other group care situation:
 - ∞ If visits are to be continued, an introduction to the supervising staff person should be made. The facility schedule should be taken into consideration when arranging visits. Continuing the visits at least through the transition period is recommended.

