

## DEVELOPMENTAL SELF: SENIOR AND ELDER

### SENIOR (65–80 YEARS OLD)

#### CONTINUE THE WORK OF THE ADULT: SELF-ESTEEM, SELF-ACTUALIZATION, HEALTH

As seniors we continue with the work of the adult, extending our abilities and capabilities, resolving issues, learning life lessons, and exploring the themes of life. We seek to accomplish the tasks of being seniors, and continue to fulfill our needs. We have learned, though we may not be aware of that learning, how to create Self-esteem. As seniors, we can focus more on actualizing our Self. We know our Self better than we ever have, though again, we may not be fully aware of this knowledge. We can increase our Self-knowledge and Self-awareness if we choose to. Hopefully we have learned many lessons about our Self and about life. We can transform what we have learned into wisdom about how the Self works, and about how life works.

As seniors, we seek to maintain our health: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Keeping healthy involves moving: moving the body, mind, emotions, and spirit. We exercise, think, feel, and pray/visualize/experience God or Spirit, according to our beliefs.

#### DEEPEN AND ENRICH RELATIONSHIPS: BELONGING AND LOVING

We have experienced romantic relationships, family relationships, and friendships. We may have had close relationships with co-workers and colleagues. We may have participated in groups and organizations. As seniors we can use our experience, knowledge, and wisdom to deepen the relationships we value. We can enrich and expand our sense of belonging and loving.

You can enjoy this sense of belonging.

#### EXPANSION INTO NEW AREAS

Based on our accomplishments and successes, we have the opportunity to greatly extend our abilities, capabilities, and skills into new, exciting, and expansive activities.

We may:

- Engage in new work areas as an expert or as a beginner. We can look for opportunities to teach what we have learned in the workplace, becoming a consultant or volunteer.

- Find new and expand old pleasures, happiness, and joy. Examples are: traveling, developing creative abilities like painting or writing, gardening, enjoying nature, enjoying sex, exploring new foods, cooking, enjoying sports and being physically active, and seeing more movies. The opportunities are endless, if we seek them.
- Be a grandparent. If the opportunity isn't there right now, become a foster grandparent. Go to the playground and watch the children playing. Be energized by their play and the fun they are having.
- Explore all that the "New Age" has to offer. Take workshops. Read books. Practice yoga.
- Go into therapy, individual or group.
- Develop and strengthen important and necessary attitudes like Self-acceptance and Self-love, for example.

***Point of Empowerment:*** *Self-acceptance can bring you peace and the ability to love yourself.*

***Practice:*** *Look back over your life. See that you could never, ever, have been different than you were in any particular moment in time. State the affirmation, "I accept who I was then, who I am now, and who I am becoming. I am—and am becoming—more Self-accepting."*

## COMPLETION OF UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Unfinished business refers to past painful experiences that continue to be with us, as they continue to have a "negative emotional charge." The pain of these experiences still exists within us and causes us physical, mental, and emotional distress. Examples of unfinished business usually begin with "I remember." For example, I remember:

- When my friend betrayed me by teasing me along with the other kids.
- When my father humiliated me by insulting me in front of relatives.
- When my wife/husband cheated on me.
- The shame I experienced when I was playing baseball, the team was depending on me, and I struck out.

***Point of Empowerment:*** *Everyone carries these memories around within their Self. As a senior, it is time to release and heal these painful memories and feelings.*

***Practice:*** *Embark upon a personal healing quest to make peace with the past and to release painful emotions associated with the past. Become free.*

## EXPERIENCING LOSS

This stage of life (65–80 years old), being a senior, often contains many losses that a person needs to cope with. If we have not already experienced the death of our parents, this will most likely occur during this time period. There is also the death of other family members and friends.

There may also be the loss of one's health. Declining health can be devastating for an individual. The loss of health can be sudden or gradual. There may also be the loss of a person's standard of living. As this can be very hard to cope with, a person can become anxious and depressed.

A senior's coping ability may become extremely stressed. Feelings of grief and sadness from prior losses in life can become activated. We cope with loss and grief through the process of mourning. Mourning losses can be a process with a beginning, a middle, and an ending. However, multiple losses can severely tax a person's ability to complete the mourning process. Depression may occur. A person can be overwhelmed by sadness and grief.

***Point of Empowerment:*** *Along with support from loved ones, deepening your religion and spirituality can be a way of coping with loss.*

***Practice:*** *Acknowledge the losses in your life. Look toward your religion and/or spirituality for comfort, support, strength, and inspiration.*

## BEAUTY, MYSTERY, THE TRANSCENDENT: RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY, WISDOM

As seniors we can focus on fulfilling our need for beauty, mystery, and the transcendent. We can appreciate the beauty of nature, of art and architecture, of people and humanity. We can enjoy mystery stories and films. We can wonder about the mysteries of life and death. Seeking the transcendent involves deepening our experience of our religion and/or spirituality. Meditation can bring us experiences of the transcendent. We can develop transcendent humor. To do this, we recognize and appreciate the absurdity of life: that life is full of surprises, paradoxes, and contradictions, and often doesn't go the way we expect it to go. As seniors we have a lifetime of experience and knowledge, even if we are not fully aware of these resources. We can remember, think, feel, and assimilate and integrate our experiences and knowledge. We then create wisdom. We experience the limitations of being "older" (not old), yet at this stage of life we can have a wisdom that was not possible at a "younger" age.

## ENDING SUFFERING

As seniors we do not have to be over focused on the past or the future. We can be in the moment, focused on the present. One of the many benefits of this is that we can end our

suffering. We end our suffering by accepting what is in the moment. We end our suffering by letting go of anguish about the past and worry about the future.

**Point of Empowerment:** *Suffering is caused by fighting what is in the present moment.*

**Practice:** *Breath in and out; relax. Say to your Self, I accept all that is, in this present moment.*

## LOOK TO THE FUTURE

A senior may say, “I have no future.” This statement is deadly. It will literally kill you. Yes, the long-term future may look bleak, with declining health and death. One solution here is to look forward to the near future and make plans for pleasure and fun. Another approach is to investigate what dying is all about. Do we cease to exist or is there an afterlife? If there is an afterlife, what could that be like? Is there reincarnation? (Billions of people believe in reincarnation.) What could reincarnation be like? What do you want in your next life? Read about people’s near-death experiences. Try a past life regression.

## CELEBRATE LIFE

We can acknowledge and celebrate our accomplishments in the areas of family, love, and work. We can “give our Self credit” for our achievements. Occasionally a person may see his Self as largely a failure in life. But everyone has some successes, and acknowledging them can provide momentum for moving forward. Sometimes, just putting one foot in front of the other is a triumph.

**Practice:** *Focus on having fun, and on pleasure, happiness, and joy as your way of celebrating life.*

## ELDER (80+ YEARS OLD)

### THE WORK OF A SENIOR

As an elder we continue the work of the senior.

### ELDER: THE BEST STAGE OF LIFE

Being an elder can potentially be the best stage of life. As an aspect of the developmental self, the elder stage can potentially be the culmination of the accomplishments of a lifetime. What does a person need to do throughout the life cycle to make this true? What does an elder have to do to make this the best stage of life?

***Point of Empowerment:*** *The tasks of making “being an elder” the best stage of life, and the tasks of making the most out of the life we live, are the same.*

Here are some of these tasks:

- Maintain our health
- Consciously grow, mature, develop, and evolve (physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually)
- Consciously seek to accomplish our tasks and fulfill our needs to our fullest potential
- Resolve our issues, learn life lessons, and explore the themes of life
- Continually push to expand our limitations, taking on challenges
- Love and have loving relationships
- Experience happiness, joy, pleasure, and gratitude
- Learn to tolerate pain and painful feelings
- Learn to hear the messages of our feelings
- Let go, seek closure, completion, and healing
- Connect to the divine with religion or some form of spirituality
- Cultivate wisdom
- Practice the challenge: Think about every thought. Seek to feel good all the time. Give and receive only love.

## CONSCIOUS DYING

Today more people than ever are exploring the idea of conscious dying. (Of course, we cannot die consciously if we have not lived consciously.) Conscious dying involves maintaining awareness, alertness, and consciousness before, during, and after the death process. Some people are finding this an exciting prospect. There are certain assumptions here. One is that our consciousness continues to exist after life. You may not believe this, but it can be fun to explore the possibilities.

***Practice:*** *Be curious about the process of dying. Learn about dying as a way to overcome our natural fear of dying*