

Combating Increased Impacts Of Isolation Among Older Adults With Sensory Loss

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ST. LOUIS— 83 percent of older adults live with at least one form of sensory loss, according to a survey by Home Instead, Inc. While those with sensory loss have always faced an increased risk of feeling isolated, the pandemic has further reduced their ability to fully connect with the world around them, leading to a diminished quality of life.

“Over the last year, we have grown increasingly more aware of the negative effects of social isolation,” said Lakelyn Hogan, Ph.D., gerontologist, and caregiver advocate at Home Instead, Inc. “Older adults living with limited or diminished senses are faced with the added stress and difficulties brought on by prolonged isolation from their loved ones. And it’s especially important to consider their needs, as they may have an especially difficult time staying connected.”

Now more than ever, it is important for family members, caregivers and the community as a whole to be mindful of the signs of sensory loss and take proactive steps to ensure these individuals feel embraced and engaged.

Each of the five senses plays a role in keeping us connected to the world around us. When they are weakened, it can become difficult and frightening to navigate an environment that is not designed to accommodate impaired vision, hearing, mobility and more.

“Some older adults have been able to use video chats and phone calls to stay in touch with family during the pandemic,” said Christina Prinster, client & community services director of the St. Louis Home Instead®. “In fact, according to a recent study by Home Instead, Inc., one in four - 28% - feel more comfortable using new technology than they did one year ago. But that technology may not work for seniors with failing eyesight or hearing. For them, isolation remains a threat.”

Prioritize Thoughtful Connection

All of us can play a role in ensuring the aging population feels supported and connected during these times. Prinster offers these tips from Home Instead to help connect:

- Contact older loved ones or neighbors regularly and create meaningful interactions to ensure they feel valued.
- During phone calls, be sure to speak up and enunciate your words clearly.
- When possible, visit in person from a socially safe distance.
- Consider using a clear mask to help those with hearing loss read your lips.

Lead with Empathy

One simple way to make those with sensory loss feel included is to practice empathy. By putting ourselves in their shoes, we can help create a more inclusive and aging-friendly world for our loved ones, neighbors and others in the community.

“We can find opportunities to lead with empathy in everyday situations,” explains Hogan. “For example, if you’re in line at the grocery store and an older adult in front of you is having a hard time grabbing their credit card from their wallet, instead of getting frustrated, take a deep breath and remember that they may not have the same sensitivity in their fingers as you do.”

To help others better understand the unique challenges of living with sensory loss, Home Instead offices throughout the bi-state area are offering free “[Aging SensesSM](#)” resources designed to help families and the community start a larger conversation

around the impacts of sensory loss. Tools include an online sensory loss simulation and instructions on how to create a do-it-yourself Aging Senses Kit.

To get familiar with the signs and symptoms, Home Instead offers simple DIY activities to simulate sensory loss – things like walking with corn kernels in your socks to experience the feeling of walking with neuropathy or putting masking tape on your glasses to better understand vision with glaucoma.

For more information, including an interactive experience so you may see firsthand the challenges of sensory loss, visit www.AgingSenses.com or contact your local Home Instead office at 888-331-1023.