

“We all need kindness, we all need touch.” (Natan Zach)

Advice for Senior Citizens, the Elderly and their Families in These Times

Written by the Gerontology Counseling staff, Machon Beer Emunah

During this period, when we are all in a state of crisis and pain, the elderly among us, in particular, need assistance in how to cope. On the one hand, an elderly person has the perspective and life experience which can help him and all of us at this time, but on the other hand, many elderly are now home alone, with mobility issues or distance from family members.

Machon Beer Emunah sees its mission to develop resources and public discourse for the elderly and their families.

The gerontology counseling staff of the institute has put together a number of suggestions for you (relevant not only for senior citizens...):

Taking Care of your Body, Taking Care of your Soul

- **Go out.** (Of course, taking security into consideration). Go out into the fresh air. It can be on your balcony, to your garden, to a nature spot, and if possible, for a short walk in order to get some sun and move your body.
- **Physical activity.** Whoever can – it's important to maintain mobility and physical activity. It impacts on both physical and emotional health.
- **Music.** Prepare a playlist, or ask a family member to help you, of music that you like and makes you feel good.
- **Take a deep breath!** More than ever, it's important to pay attention to your breathing, inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly. Deep and long breaths makes us breath more beneficially.
- **Don't hold it in!** Speak with your family members or someone else, share your feelings; don't keep them inside. If you have no one to speak with, call the welfare department hotline 118, or a local agency. There are many volunteers who would be happy to be an attentive ear.)

Doing for Others

Be active and giving. Be generous. Everyone has something to offer others!!

- Giving can be done anywhere, even from your easy chair at home: **Write a letter** – to your grandchildren, to a soldier, to a family that's been evacuated. **Send a WhatsApp** to your relatives and ask how they're doing.
- **Neighbors and relatives.** Cook a meal for a neighbor whose husband has been called up, invite your neighbors' children to play at your house or to bake cookies together for another neighbor.
- **Ask a relative** what you can do to help.
- What else? **Smile** to your neighbor, to an acquaintance in the store, to the repairman.
- **Say thank you.** To children, to the doctor, to your caregiver. Take note that it's hard for them too. Treat your caregiver with some chocolate or a special gift.

For Myself

- **Take care of yourself, especially now!** Get dressed in the morning, even put on makeup ☺ , fix up your house, straighten up. Take care of your plants, and even dare to get something new.
- **What fulfills you?** Make some time for it each day – coffee with a friend, art, meditation, a television series or good sketches, dance, music, or anything that makes you feel happy.
- **Write a personal prayer** each day
- **Keep a diary**
- **Thanks.** End each day with writing three things you are thankful for.

Don't be afraid to invest in yourself, to be happy, to increase good. There's no fault in pleasure and investing in life. The opposite - that energy will spread out to everyone. And we all need kindness.

Communicate with Family Members

- **Share and discuss.** Don't be afraid to share what you're feeling with your family. It's important for them to hear you and to express themselves.
- **Give lots of hugs:** It's good for you and good for them. Research shows that a 20 second hug (yes, that's a lot of time) causes a release of hormones and a neurological calming.
- **You have experience!** Tell your children and grandchildren your story: What helped you during other wars, write them. Sit down and write your life story. It will be a gift for yourself and for them.

And in summary, it's important for us to say:

We look at you elderly and are filled with respect, and turn to you for advice.

You have so much wisdom and life experience!

***Remember your strengths.** Remember other times of crisis, the strengths that helped you in the past, during the wars and difficult times. These strengths will serve you once again. Tell, and share with your dear ones who are younger.*

What a tremendous resource you are for them! What hope and strength hold the words of an older person who has endured wars and hard times and is here now to tell and relate.

You are a person with a history and are a role model for your children and grandchildren.

Advice for family members:

- **Listen.** Even when it's hard, allow the elderly person to express his fears and trepidations, so that he's not alone with his feelings.
- **Visit** as much as possible. Try to create family times. Meetings with children adds to life, and we all need times of togetherness and closeness.
- **Hugs hugs** (Did we already say this? You need it too 😊)
- **There's nothing like experience.** Ask your parents what helped them during other wars. How did they cope? What gave them hope? Be alert that the conversation helps the older person and doesn't overwhelm him. Sometimes dealing with the past is too difficult.
- Of course, **be alert to situations which require treatment** or professional intervention. Take note that sometimes, raising memories of the past (from the Holocaust), or encountering the current situation, are too difficult and can cause unusual fears or depression. In cases like this, get professional advice.
- **Disagreement.** The situation invites the possibility that differences in behavior may arise between you and your parents. For example, you want Dad to move in with you temporarily, and he refuses, or Mom doesn't go to the safe room during the sirens. Practice making "I" statements rather than 'You.' For example, instead of saying, "You're so irresponsible," it's better to say, "It really scares me when you go so far from the safe room. Please take care of yourself." If we adopt this type of conversing all the time, then even under pressure there's greater chance that we'll be able to relay the proper message.
- **Respect their choices.** Remember that as long as your parents are lucid, they are ultimately responsible for their actions and decisions. Make sure they have the proper information regarding dangers and emergency preparedness, discuss their and your feelings with them, express your opinions, but in the end, they will decide what's best for them.

Some tips for families of people with dementia:

- **Make sure not to spend a lot of time listening to the news** when a person with dementia is present. He may hear these things each time as if anew, and be scared.
- If there is a siren and it's necessary to go to the safe room – **give clear instructions** what to do: for example, go to the room on the left, or take your cane and come with me.
- **Say in simple words that you are at their side**, that you're not going anywhere without them, that you won't leave them. You need to repeat this message over and over in order to strengthen their feeling of security.
- **Share that you too are scared.** Give them an opportunity to give you comfort and encouragement. After all, they've already been through several wars.
- **Utilize music:** it screens out external noises, calms and distracts. If possible, prepare a list of songs on your phone for them to listen to.

Remember the caretakers and foreign workers

Your/your parents'/ your spouse/s caretakers are here alone, without any family members, in a scary reality with instructions in a foreign language they don't understand. Some of the people who were attacked were foreign workers.

- **Remember – you are their home, their family**
- **Make sure they have the relevant information and instructions**, review the instructions with them so they know what to do in case of a siren.
- **Ask how they're doing**, ask if they're frightened, what they need
- Think about how you can give them a **break or some respite**
- **Treat** them with something special, during this time

“We all want to love, we all want to be happy, so we'll feel good, so we'll have strength (Natan Zach)

Thank you to our faculty who took part in writing this article: Amanda Klahr, Tamar Javasky, Dr. Dana Peer, Rachel Atoun, Iris Szolty, Ruth Weinshik-Vener, Osnat Hacoheh, Nili Arbel