



Mental Health Questions for Risk Assessment for Seniors

Please Note: This document offers suggestions on ways to frame a conversation related to mental health concerns for seniors. This is not a clinical document and should not be treated as such.

We all go through stressful events from time to time that can change our normal behavior. Short-term changes to behavior are common. We may feel more stressed, angry, or sad. These feelings are normal mental health changes. But changes in behavior can be a sign that an individual is developing a mental illness. You may notice that the individual starts to behave differently. You may see a change over a short time or over a number of months. Below are some common behavioral changes to look out for. An individual may:

- be anxious
- be irritable
- try to start arguments
- have mood swings
- inflict self-harm
- sleep too much or too little
- want to be alone
- experience concentration problems
- have memory problems
- eat more or less than normal

If you are seeing any of the above behaviors in the senior you're caring for or working with, then it's suggested that you try asking some questions to determine whether you need to escalate your concerns to your director. The right questions can assist you in helping the senior by giving you insight into their well-being.

You can begin the conversation with “How are you feeling?” Following that question, here are a few other supportive and non-judgmental questions for you to ask:

1. I’ve noticed you _____. How’s everything going for you?
2. How would you like things to be different?
3. I know _____. (Acknowledge something that is happening in their life or happened during COVID isolation.) Is there anything you want to talk about?

While having this conversation with the senior, really listen. If the senior is having a tough time and is willing to share, they want to be heard. Show that you’re listening by repeating back some of what they are telling you. For example, “So, you feel that ...” or “It sounds like you ...” Acknowledge their feelings. It never hurts to say (or repeat) that you care. Share concern, but not panic or judgment.

If, after asking these questions, you have concerns about potential signs of anxiety, depression or cognitive impairment, or other issues, please escalate your concerns to your director. Your director and/or a licensed clinical social worker on staff will know how to proceed with the situation and get the necessary care and treatment for the senior.