Mental Health

Social Connections
A Resource for Caregivers

Asian American Health Initiative
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services
Maya recently moved in with her daughter, Sara. The adjustment to a new environment has been more difficult than she imagined. Maya used to be outgoing and active but lately, she has not been her usual self. Maya has become more quiet and has started to get frequent headaches. One day, Sara returns home from work and finds Maya staring out the window.

Hi mom. I’m home! Sorry I am late again. Traffic was bad.

Hi Sara. You are finally home!

Yes, it was a long drive home. I am going to go prepare dinner for us.

You must be tired. Let me help you!
You have a bad knee mom, it’s okay. You should not stand for too long. Why don’t you sit down and watch TV until dinner is ready?

Mom, you are barely eating anything! You are getting so frail and look so weak these days. You should eat.

I have been doing that all day! I’m so tired of sitting down. Plus, they speak so fast, I have a hard time understanding the TV. But, what can I do if she does not need my help?

Okay...

I am not feeling too hungry today…Back home, I used to eat fresh fruits and vegetables from my own garden! The food here has no taste.
Your blood pressure has been high these days, so I did not put as much salt, maybe that is why it tastes different?

No, it’s not the salt… It’s just— I miss the food I used to eat.

Maybe next time we can go to the Asian market and you can find some of the vegetables you like.

I wish I could go to the grocery store and go outside without depending on anyone. I am just a burden on Sara!

Will you be able to take me on Saturday?

Mason has a soccer game on Saturday. How about next weekend?
Like many weekends, Sara was busy running errands and Maya stayed home alone.

I miss the TV series I used to watch.

It is so quiet in here!

I never see the neighbors outside!

I guess I will try to get some sleep.

Did you know?

Spending more time connecting to the community through volunteering, attending religious services, participating in club activities, and exploring personal hobbies is found to be related to lower levels of loneliness.

Source: AARP Foundation
Mom? I am home. Is everything okay? Why are you sitting in the dark?

Hi Sara. I’m alright. I just have a headache and thought I would take a nap.

Oh… what did you do today? Were you able to take a shower? Should I check your blood pressure?

My blood pressure is fine! Can you just set up the video call with your Aunt Kim for me? No one has been around to set up the video call and I haven’t talked to her in days.
Sara helped Maya video call Aunt Kim. Walking by Maya’s room, Sara overhears her mom talking to her aunt.

Kim, it’s been so long. How are you? How is everyone at home?

It’s hard for me to get anywhere by myself. The bus system is confusing, and I am not able to drive here.

Everyone treats me like I’m so old and as if I cannot do anything. I know Sara means well and it’s great being with my family, but I’m so bored these days.

I miss the garden club. Remember how much fun we used to have? Those were good times. Now I am just sitting home every day, waiting for the next day. I feel a little sad and lonely.

I never realized mom was feeling this way. I have been so busy and have not paid attention to what was going on with mom. I wanted mom to take it easy as she got older but did not realize she was feeling so disconnected.
I am so sorry to hear that. Unfortunately, loneliness and social isolation is very common among older adults and it can impact both physical health and mental health.

Social isolation and loneliness? Can you tell me a little bit more about it?

Did you know?

**Signs that a person might be isolated**
- Deep boredom, general lack of interest and withdrawal
- Losing interest in personal hygiene
- Poor eating and nutrition
- Significant disrepair, clutter, and hoarding in the home

*Source: AARP Foundation*
There are many resources that can help you and your mom, such as senior centers and transportation programs. It is important that you let your mom drive this process. Ask her what she needs and see how you can support her.

That sounds like a great place to start the conversation with my mom. Thank you so much for these resources.

Adjusting to a new family dynamic is challenging for many older adults. When older adults move to a new place, especially a new country, they are unable to contribute to their community in the same ways they are used to.

Without a sense of purpose they used to have, combined with a new culture, language barrier, and often limited mobility, social isolation, and loneliness start to grow.

That makes a lot of sense. What can I do to help her and improve this situation?
After reading through the resources, and realizing her role as a caregiver, Sara approaches her mom the next evening.

Hi mom, I know the transition to the new place has not been easy for you. I have been so busy and you have not been able to get out of the house much. I want you to be happy while you are here. What can I do to make this change easy for you?

Oh, Sara! I know you are doing everything you can to make it comfortable for me. I just—I am stuck home all day with nowhere to go. I miss doing the things I used to do. I miss meeting people and just being able to talk and connect.

I had no idea you were feeling this way, mom. Let’s talk about what may help you to feel more connected and independent. I have learned about a senior center close by, maybe we could visit it.
I know you feel a little uncomfortable because English is not your first language, but you have my support. How about we see if you like the senior center. It could be a good way to meet people.

Sure, I guess I can try it out. I also want to get back into gardening. Maybe we can go and get some gardening supplies this weekend?

That is a great idea mom! Also, I have a surprise for you! I got you a tablet! You can use it to make video calls and connect with your friends and Aunt Kim back home.

Mason will set it up this weekend and is going to teach you how to use it. You will be an expert in no time!

Thank you, Sara. This sounds great. It will really help me connect with my friends.

Did you know?
Caregiver is a term used to describe individuals that provide support to another person in need. It could be a family member, relative, neighbor, a respite caregiver or a paid professional.

Source: National Institutes of Health
For a few months, Mason took Maya to the senior center every week. At the senior center, Maya learned how to use the bus system and started going to the center by herself. She also took a knitting class and made some new friends. Her busy schedule and daily routine gave her a sense of purpose and greatly improved her mood.

It is nice out...maybe I will try walking to the center today!

My friends have such a great sense of humor!

Need to pick tomatoes from the garden for dinner tonight!

It is so good to be able to watch old movies!

With everyday, Maya’s confidence to engage in new activities and learn new skills continues to build. Next week, she is planning to teach a workshop on gardening at the senior center!
### UNDERSTANDING LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♦ Lack of knowledge about available resources</td>
<td>♦ Complains of aches, pains, and headaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Transportation barriers</td>
<td>♦ High blood pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Loss of community network</td>
<td>♦ Greater risk of heart disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Limited financial resources</td>
<td>♦ Increased vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Physical disability</td>
<td>♦ Poor cognitive performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Language and cultural barrier</td>
<td>♦ Early onset of dementia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Limited mobility</td>
<td>♦ Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♦ Change in role</td>
<td>♦ Suicidal ideation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** AARP Foundation

### HOW TO STAY CONNECTED AND ENGAGED

- Find an activity that you enjoy
- Meet your neighbors, both young and old
- Exercise to boost your mood
- Volunteer to deepen your sense of purpose
- Take a class and expand your circle of friends
- Schedule a time each day to call someone
- Revisit an old hobby
- Find out about your transportation options
- Visit local community wellness or senior centers
- Use technology and social media to stay connected

**Source:** National Institute on Aging; Administration on Aging
# Montgomery County Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aging and Disability Resource Unit</th>
<th>Villages in Montgomery County</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Person Icon] 240-777-3000</td>
<td>![House Icon] 240-777-1231</td>
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</table>
| Provides information and resources for seniors and/or people with disabilities and their caretakers/home aids, including:  
  - Support for family caregivers  
  - Financial assistance  
  - Senior Care Subsidy Program  
  - Transportation  
  - Housing  
  - In-home care  
  - Adult Protective Services | Local, volunteer-led, grassroots organizations that aim to support the community who chose to age-in-place. They foster social connections through activities and events and coordinate volunteer help at home using neighbor helping neighbor model.  
[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/Villages/Villagesindex.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/ADS/Villages/Villagesindex.html) |

## Recreational/Volunteering

**Montgomery County 50+ Volunteer Network: 240-777-2600**  
The program matches skilled volunteers with nonprofit and government agencies needing assistance.  

**Montgomery County Senior Calendar:**  
Provides a list of local events, activities, and workshops such as computer tutoring classes, English conversation classes, free Tai Chi classes and more.  
[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior/calendar.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior/calendar.html)

**Senior Recreation Programs: 240-777-6840**  
Provides information on various facilities, recreation centers and aquatic centers in Montgomery County. Also provides information on senior membership passes and group classes.
Montgomery County Senior Centers

**240-777-4925**

Provides a wide range of programs, services, and activities such as fitness & dance classes, educational seminars, health & wellness programs, travel & volunteer opportunities, individual & team sports, a weekday lunch program, a wide variety of drop-in programs, lectures, seminars and more.

www.montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/facilities/seniorcenters/

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Center</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Operating Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>240-777-6995</td>
<td>9701 Main Street, Damascus, MD 20872</td>
<td>Monday-Friday: 9:00am-4:00pm Saturday-Sunday: CLOSED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday Park</td>
<td>240-777-4999</td>
<td>3950 Ferrara Drive, Silver Spring, MD 20906</td>
<td>Monday-Friday: 9:00am-4:00pm Saturday-Sunday: CLOSED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Branch</td>
<td>240-777-6975</td>
<td>8700 Piney Branch Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20901</td>
<td>Monday-Friday: 9:00am-2:30pm Saturday-Sunday: CLOSED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Schweinhaut</td>
<td>240-777-8085</td>
<td>1000 Forest Glen Rd, Silver Spring, MD 20901</td>
<td>Monday-Friday: 8:15am-4:00pm Saturday: 9:00am-3:00pm Sunday: CLOSED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Potomac</td>
<td>240-773-4805</td>
<td>13850 Travilah Rd, Rockville, MD 20850</td>
<td>Monday-Friday: 9:00am-3:00pm Saturday-Sunday: CLOSED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Oak</td>
<td>240-777-6944</td>
<td>1700 April Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20904</td>
<td>Monday-Friday: 9:00am-3:00pm Saturday-Sunday: CLOSED</td>
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Montgomery County Older Adult Transportation Options: Provides convenient travel information on free and discounted transportation options for older adults 50+. www.montgomerycountymd.gov/senior/transportation.html

Senior Transportation Resources at a Glance

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<tr>
<th>Ride-On</th>
<th>Connect-A-Ride</th>
<th>Senior Connection</th>
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<tr>
<td>240-777-0311</td>
<td>301-738-3252</td>
<td>301-962-0820</td>
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Seniors 65+ ride FREE with valid Senior SmarTrip Card or Medicare card with photo ID. Free information & referral services. Helps adults 50+ find transportation for medical services, social activities and more. Provides FREE escorted transportation services to seniors 60+ through a growing network of volunteers.

OTHER RESOURCES

AARP Caregiving Resources: 1-877-333-5885 Provides information caregiving, tips on how to manage stress, burnout and more. www.aarp.org/caregiving

Eldercare Locator: 1-800-677-1116 Provides service that connects older adult and their caregivers to transportation, home care, caregiver needs training and more.

There are linguistically and culturally sensitive mental health providers available to the Asian American community. For more information, please contact the Asian American Health Initiative at 240-777-4517.

For more information on local resources for Asian American older adults in Montgomery County, please contact the Asian American Health Initiative at 240-777-4517.
The Asian American Health Initiative (AAHI) would like to express its deepest appreciation to its community partners and staff in making this publication possible.

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Special Thanks to:

- AAHI Steering Committee
- AARP Foundation – E.A Casey
- Pan Asian Volunteer Health Clinic (CCACC)
- Cross Cultural Infotech (CCIT)
- Hina Mehta
- Montgomery County’s HHS AAA Caregiver Support Program – Lylie Fisher & Pazit Aviv
- M.K. Lee
- Vietnamese American Services (VAS)

The development of this photonovel is made possible by Mental Health Ambassadors, a group of advocates and professionals who volunteered their time to inform and direct this photonovel project, ensuring it aligned with and captured key mental health and wellness issues facing Asian American older adults. Incorporating both the caregiver and older adult perspectives, the Mental Health Ambassadors met to discuss a plot and storyline to make this photonovel project possible. Without their gracious time and effort, this mental health educational tool would not be the invaluable community-driven project that it is. Thank you to all the Mental Health Ambassadors!

Disclaimer: The characters, places, and incidents depicted in this photonovel are fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is entirely coincidental.