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The Later Years – Getting Along With Others  
Michigan State University Extension Service  
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# THE LATER YEARS of LIFE

## 4.

### Getting Along With Others

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**S**hakespeare wrote, "Crabbed age and youth cannot live together. Youth is full of pleasure, age is full of care." The fact is, age and youth **must** live together and can, if one is respectful of the other. Nor is being "crabby" necessarily a characteristic of the later years. Cantankerous, complaining and intolerant older persons were probably just as hard to get along with in their youth. Actually, our attitudes about how we interact with other people do not dramatically change with advancing years; they only tend to be reinforced by years of practice.

### Promoting Positive Relationships with Others

In providing a prescription for living, Dr. Thomas S. Cunningham of Oklahoma State University maintains: "I need an attitude which says that people are important, that people are significant, that the other person is an important being in my life. I need to recognize that love is not found; it is given."

What Dr. Cunningham is promoting is a continued giving in the later years, a positive attitude that does not expect others to take the initiative. That giving, or service to others, can take many forms...from active and genuine interest in others as expressed by a letter or a telephone call...to the more tangible expressions of a baked gift, a mended stocking, or a repaired wall plug.

It has been said that our service to others becomes our finest expression of ourselves and maintains our visibility in this world.

### Living with Other Family Members

Most older persons prefer to maintain their own homes as long as possible. Sometimes, however, it seems advantageous for parents to live with their adult children for purposes of child care, for economic reasons, or because of failing health.

Unless both the adult children and their parents feel comfortable about an extended family situation, and have realistically and truthfully discussed their expectations of one another, other alternatives for housing should be explored. Lorene Keeler of Oklahoma State University warns, "Because a child is 60 and a parent 80, (this) does not mean that there is maturity on the part of the

parent or the child. If conflicts were unresolved during the child's early years in the parental home, if the two generations still find each other a constant source of irritation, taking the (older) person into the home under a mistaken sense of duty and obligation may make for much unhappiness for all concerned. It may also create a sad example of the aging years for children growing up in the home."

### Tips for Harmonious Living

Evelyn Duvall, in her book, **In-Laws, Pros and Cons**, presents some common sense recommendations for harmonious living:

**D**evelop together a clear understanding of financial, household, and other responsibilities.

**B**e reasonable in your expectations of one another.

**M**ake some provision for protecting the personal property of each family member.

**R**espect each person's need for privacy.

**E**ncourage new members of the household to develop their own talents and to pursue their interests in their own way.

**J**ointly plan for whole-family activities so that each may share in deciding what is to be done and what part he or she will play.

**A**s disagreements arise (and they will from time to time) take the time to hear each other out. Respond to feelings as well as to the "sense" of the situation.

**U**nify the larger family unit, sharing the household by celebrations and rituals which unify.

**T**ake a positive attitude toward your joint living arrangements by being appreciative of the benefits derived from sharing the household.

"A Pleasant Person Makes Pleasant Company," by Dr. Burt Coody, an Extension Specialist at the University of Kentucky, offers these tips for making ourselves more pleasant to be around:

Avoid self-pity.

Realize that life provides gains as well as losses.

Avoid developing into a pessimistic "worry wart."

Be able to see the bright side of life as well as its shadows.

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In cooperation with  
the Human Development  
Impact Committee

Express anger appropriately when feeling it.

Find constructive ways of self-expression that are not hurtful to yourself or to others.

The following prayer speaks for itself. The wisdom embodied in it strikes at the heart of our desire for satisfying relationships with our friends and loved ones as we experience the later years of life.

### THE COMMODORE'S PRAYER

Lord, Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will some day be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful but not moody, helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends in the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others' pains but help me to endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a Saint—some of them are so hard to live with—but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places and talents in unexpected people. And give me, Lord, the grace to tell them so.

AMEN

—Author Unknown

### References and Recommended Reading

Evelyn Duvall. *In-Laws, Pros and Cons*. New York: Association Press, 1954.

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