

FEATURED

## 5 ways older adults can boost their mental health

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Ruthann McFadden  
Sarah Laughland Photography

Licensed clinical social worker Ruthann McFadden, of Frederick, has spent more than 20 years helping others.

As a therapist with Trauma Specialists of Maryland, she strives to support clients as they work through their feelings while realizing their strengths.

In addition to working with older adults on a professional level, McFadden also cares for her 95-year-old mother.

Grief has many levels, McFadden says, and older adults in particular can experience grief in many ways, such as losing a loved one, grieving the loss of their home after moving, missing a pet, or grieving the loss of mobility or other abilities.

McFadden recently connected with Prime Time to chat about the unique struggles older adults face and her advice for boosting mental health.

### **1. Focus on how you contribute to relationships.**

Some older adults feel as though they're a burden to their caregivers, who are sometimes their spouses or adult children, McFadden says. It can be difficult to rely on others when you lose the ability to do things for yourself, so McFadden suggests focusing on the ways you do contribute to those relationships.

"With my older adults, I spend a lot of time trying to focus on what they can do," McFadden said. "What is it you do contribute to the relationship?"

### **2. Embrace self-care.**

Engaging in activities that give you joy is a form of self-care. Nurturing a pet or starting a garden, for example, can benefit your mental health.

"Self-care can mean anything to anybody," McFadden said.

It takes on different forms for different people.

It's often described as doing things for your own joy and well-being.

### **3. Try exercising or simply getting fresh air.**

Exercise is not only good for physical health but for your mental health as well.

"It boosts endorphins. Go to the Y, or even take a walk in the neighborhood," McFadden advises.

For those who may have limited mobility, she suggests having someone take you outside to enjoy the environment, even if it's just outside of your door.

#### **4. Spend time with loved ones.**

The people you hold dearest — friends, family, or even pets — should surround you when you're feeling down. During the age of COVID-19, that may look like a phone call or video chat.

"I think spending time with family and friends, if you have them, is very important," McFadden said, and pets can be "extremely helpful" in terms of boosting mental health, too.

"Even if it can't be a cat or a dog, maybe a bird ... something that kind of keeps you focused outside of yourself, something that allows you to feel [and] to provide nurturing" can be beneficial, she added.

It can be easy to isolate yourself when you're feeling down, but McFadden recommends resisting that urge. She suggests older adults try to recognize when they're self-isolating and reach out for help instead.

#### **5. Consider seeing a therapist.**

McFadden has found there's stigma surrounding mental health and taking steps to improve it, especially in older generations. There can be a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality among older adults, or the impression that someone with depression or anxiety is flawed, McFadden says.

But she doesn't see it that way.

"There's no shame in caring for your mental health throughout your life," she says. In fact, she believes it's as important as caring for your physical health.

If you're feeling depressed or anxious, consider seeing a licensed professional who can help you work through your struggles. You can also confide in clergy if you're religious.

"You don't have to do this by yourself," McFadden emphasized.

*For those interested in learning more about the services of Trauma Specialists of Maryland, visit them online at [traumaspecialistsofmd.com](http://traumaspecialistsofmd.com), email [info@traumaspecialistsofmd.com](mailto:info@traumaspecialistsofmd.com), or call 301-304-7108.*

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