

# When the Rules Change:

*Navigating Aging in Today's World*

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A Mental Health Perspective on Thriving Through Change



## Presenter:

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# A Mental Health Lens on Aging

This webinar isn't about preventing aging — it's about building the inner resources to meet it well.



## Emotional Well-Being

Understanding and working with the emotions that arise with physical and life changes



## Connection & Compassion

Building relationships and practicing self-compassion through the aging journey



## Practical Tools

Concrete strategies, reframes, and exercises you can use starting today



SECTION 1



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# When Your Body Rewrites the Contract

Managing Emotional Well-Being Through Physical Changes



*We don't look away from hard things here.*

# The Bargain We Make

- We eat well.
- We exercise.
- We stay social.
- We stay sharp.

**And still — the body changes.**

This isn't failure. This is aging.  
And how we respond to it matters  
enormously.



*"The goal isn't to stop  
the changes.*

*It's to stay well while  
they happen."*

**Every change in how we move through the world  
also changes how we see ourselves.**

# What Shows Up in the Therapy Room

*Two common challenges in aging:*



## Chronic Illness, Pain & Mobility

Physical changes that affect how we move through the world — and how we see ourselves.



## Memory Changes & Cognitive Concerns

One of the most feared changes — carrying deep emotional weight around identity and independence.

**These aren't just physical experiences — they're deeply emotional ones.**

# The Weight of the Walker

*"I don't want to be seen with that thing."*

Assistive devices carry a story. But we get to rewrite it.

## SURRENDER

- Old & dependent
- Loss of identity
- Giving up



## FREEDOM

- Tool for maximum independence
- Takes me to London
- My choice

*What if a cane isn't a white flag – but a set of wings?*

PRACTICE

# Sitting With Discomfort

1

Notice what makes you uncomfortable about aging — nursing homes, memory loss, needing help.

2

Don't fix it. Don't avoid it. Just observe it.

3

What feels uncomfortable for you? Where does it live in your body?

4

Process these feelings now — so they don't catch you off guard later.

*What you can sit with, you can survive.*

# Dementia: What Stays

A diagnosis does not erase a person.



**Emotions remain.**



**Humor remains.**



**Love remains.**



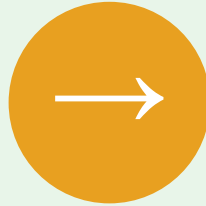
**Dignity remains.**

**How we show up for others with dementia teaches us to expect the same for ourselves.**

# Rewriting the Story

BEFORE

*"That cane means I'm  
old."*



AFTER

*"That cane takes me to  
on adventures."*

***Tools don't define us. They free us.***

Young people with invisible disabilities are leading this cultural shift — celebrating assistive devices as expressions of identity and freedom. You can be part of it.



# Ollivander's Cane Shop

Diagon Alley, London

*Which cane is calling to you?*



SECTION 2



# Asking for Help Becomes the Real Work

*Building Your Team Before You Need Them*



*Interdependence — not independence — is how humans thrive.*

# The Burden Paradox

*"I don't want to burden my children." — So we hide things. We minimize. We wait.... We isolate ourselves.*

**But hiding creates the very burden we fear:**

- 1** It removes their ability to prepare
- 2** It turns a manageable situation into a crisis
- 3** It replaces a chosen role with an emergency one

*In reality — most adult children are not just willing. They are honored.*

# What Resistance Looks Like

*It doesn't always look like stubbornness. Sometimes it looks like this:*

**1**

Canceling the home health aide after one visit

**2**

"Forgetting" to use the cane

**3**

Declining family offers until the situation becomes a crisis

**4**

Researching every alternative before making the call

**5**

Snapping at the people who are trying to help

# Two Kinds of Stigma

## External Stigma

*What we fear others will think*

- "They'll think I can't manage."
- "People will treat me differently."
- "I'll lose my standing."

## Internal Stigma

*What we tell ourselves*

- "I should be able to handle this."
- "I don't want to be weak."
- "This means it's really happening."

***Both are real. Both do damage. The internal one is often louder.***

# The Loneliness Stakes

*Loneliness isn't just painful. It's dangerous.*



Loneliness is a significant risk factor for dementia and cognitive decline



Isolation erodes independence faster than most physical conditions



Help-refusal and isolation feed each other in a quiet, dangerous cycle

***Your team is protection — for your mind, your body,  
and your independence.***

REFRAME

# Accepting Help Is a Skill.

*And it can be learned.*

Interdependence — not independence — is how humans have always thrived.

Receiving help gracefully — saying yes, saying thank you, letting someone show up for you — is a practice. The discomfort you feel is just the old story loosening its grip.

# Building Your Team

## Inner Circle

Family, close friends, a partner

## Extended Support

Neighbors, faith community, social groups

## Peer Support

Others navigating the same season of life

## Professional Layer

Doctors, therapists, case managers

## Practical Helpers

Home health aides, agencies, community services

*Your circle may look different from others'. It is no less valid, and no less possible to build.*

# The Conversation Before the Crisis

Don't wait until you have to. This week, have one conversation with one person you trust.

## PRACTICE SENTENCES

*"I want to talk about what I might need as things change."*

*"I'd like to know I can call on you."*

*"This is hard for me to say — and I'm saying it anyway."*

***When you let someone know you trust them enough to ask —  
you give them a gift too.***



SECTION 3



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# Technology Raises the Stakes

*Navigating the Digital World as Cognition  
Changes*



*Your voice. Your preferences. Your terms.*

# The New Risk Landscape

*It used to be:*

*Wandering down the street.*



*Now it's:*

*Booking a flight to a foreign city.*

***Technology didn't create cognitive vulnerability. It expanded its blast radius.***



Online purchases made in moments of confusion



International travel arranged before anyone noticed



Scammers who specifically target people in early cognitive decline



Benefits, healthcare, and financial accounts — all online, all at risk

# The Window of Opportunity

*Early cognitive changes are when the conversation must happen. Not after. Now.*

## Your Voice

Your own words,  
your own framing

## Your Preferences

What matters, what  
you fear, what you  
want

## Your Power to Choose

Who you trust and  
what they're  
permitted to do

## Your Terms

You set them now  
— before anyone  
else has to

*Wait too long, and someone else sets the terms  
for you.*

# The Trusted Person Inventory

*Think of one person you trust completely.*

*Someone who knows your values.*

*Who would tell you the truth.*

***Who would you listen to if they spoke this truth!***

*Do they know what you'd want — if you couldn't speak for yourself?*

*Have you ever told them?*

*What would it take to have that conversation this month?*

# What Your People Need to Know

**Sharing your values is more powerful than listing your preferences.**

*A person who knows your values can make inferences in new situations.*

**Start the conversation here:**

What does a good day look like? What makes life worth living?

What are your fears about losing independence or cognitive function?

Are there financial decisions you'd want a trusted person to oversee?

Give someone you trust explicit permission to speak up if they notice a change.

What does dignity mean to you?

***Ten minutes. Kitchen table. One conversation. That's your first step.***

## What Matters to Me: A Values Reflection

### CHECK THE VALUES THAT MATTER MOST TO YOU

Independence

Dignity

Comfort

Connection

Privacy

Honesty

Humor

Faith / Spirituality

Home

Safety

Autonomy over Finances

Financial Protection

Legacy

Purpose

Familiarity

Not Being a Burden

Acceptance

Quality over Quantity

# What We Built Together Today



## The Inner Work

Meeting your body's changes with honesty, new stories, and compassion — for yourself and for others



## The Relational Work

Building the team that protects your independence and asking for help before the crisis hits



## The Planning Work

Having the conversations that preserve your voice when it matters most

*These aren't one-time tasks. They're ongoing practices. Every time you return to them, you get a little more prepared.*

# Resources: Start the Conversation

## The Conversation Project

[theconversationproject.org/get-started](https://theconversationproject.org/get-started)

Free printable Conversation Starter Guides including a 'What Matters to Me' section and a guide specifically for Alzheimer's/dementia caregivers.

## Dementia Values & Priorities Tool

[careprepared.org/dementia-values-tool](https://careprepared.org/dementia-values-tool)

Free printable tool built around dementia-specific scenarios. Produces a shareable document to add to your advance directive.

## PREPARE for Your Care

[prepareforyourcare.org](https://prepareforyourcare.org)

Evidence-based, video-guided program for clarifying values and preparing a surrogate decision-maker. Free.

## NC Advance Directives

[gotplans123.org/forms](https://gotplans123.org/forms) | [sosnc.gov](https://sosnc.gov)

Got Plans: free plain-language NC-specific combined health care POA and living will. Secretary of State site: official filing registry.

*These resources supplement — not substitute for — legal documents and professional guidance.*



**Questions ?**

# How to get in touch with us:

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*Thank You!*