Starting the Conversation with your Senior Partner

General Tips

- Focus on asking open-ended questions, rather than close-ended questions
  - Close-ended questions elicit a yes/no response and are not as helpful for encouraging dialogue. For example, “Did you go to the beach last weekend?”
  - Open-ended questions elicit more of a dialogue. For example, “What did you do last weekend?”
- Start with general questions about getting to know your older adult, rather than immediately diving into content that is more medically-oriented (e.g., medications) or sensitive (e.g., depression).
- Follow your older adult’s lead if there are specific things they would like to share. Sometimes they are eager to dive right into their medical history and that’s ok!
- Be intentional about ending the conversation on a positive note. You may discuss challenges and limitations they are currently experiencing, but ideally sessions should end positively. For example, you might make sure to end by talking about things that make them happy, or reaffirming their resilience and value.

Conversation Starter Sample Questions

- I’d love to hear about your life right now. What does a typical day look like? Everything from when you wake up in the morning and how you sleep at night.
- Tell me about your friends and family. Who are the people most important to you?
- Who is in your home with you right now? Do you have pets in the home? If so, what are they?
- How has your life changed from 10 years ago? 5 years ago? 5 months ago?
- What are some things that you like to do for fun? What hobbies and interests do you have?
- What is something that you accomplished in your life that you are proudest of?
- What brings you the most joy right now? What makes you happiest?

Medication Questions:

- Who helps you with your medicines?
- Do you use a pillbox or any other mechanism to remind yourself to take the pills?
- How often do you forget to take them?
- Go through each medicine and ask what it is being taken for. How much and how often you take them? How long have they been on each medication? (if you know common side effects, ask if the resident is having any, by listing common ones.)
- For as needed meds, find out how often the resident is actually taking them and are they effective? Like: When was the last time you took this medicine? And in an average week how often do you take this medicine?
Ask about

- Allergies specifically what the symptoms of an allergy they present with.
- Over the counter medicines and how often those are taken.
  - Many OTC medicines are combinations with extra letters (like Claritin D or Tylenol PM).
  - Ask to have them read to you exactly what it says on the package.
- Vitamins and other supplements in the same way as you about prescriptions.
- If they use alcohol and how much? Cannabis and how much?
- If you are zooming with the resident and are able to see the bottles and prescription vials:
  - Look inside to see if there is more than one kind of pill in each vial.
  - Look at the expiration dates on the bottles, and if dose and direction matches what the resident says.
  - Look to see how many prescribers there are.

Mental Health Questions (Depression, Anxiety, Loneliness):

Ask:

- If they know how to recognize signs and symptoms of anxiety or depression.
- If they have been screened for depression or anxiety.
- If they have ever experienced anxiety or depression, if yes;
  - how did they address it?
  - Did they see their primary care physician? Psychiatrist? Psychologist? Social Worker? Other professional or faith-based/cultural services?
  - Did they take psychotropic medications?
  - Attend groups for support?
  - What did they find the most helpful? The least helpful?
- If they are currently being treated for depression or anxiety?
  - By whom?
  - Are they taking any psychotropic medications?
  - How effective is the medication in reducing bothersome symptoms?
- If appropriate, if they would allow you to screen them using the PHQ-9 depression screen or GAD-7 anxiety screen.
- When they have to follow up with their Primary Care Physician or other provider if they have bothersome symptoms of anxiety or depression?

Community Resource Questions:

Ask:

- Based on your conversations with your partner about depression, anxiety and loneliness what possible community resources might they need? (See https://gwep.usc.edu/interprofessional-geriatrics-curriculum-ipgc-covid-19/ for resource list)
- Do they have any needs for basic resources: food, transportation?
- Are they in need of any assistance with errands (picking up or having medications delivered) or shopping?
- Can they benefit from resources to increase social support?
- What other Age Friendly resources might they benefit from that can promote overall well-being?