

# Senior Dating

Contributed by Alberta Ellison

Getting older does not necessarily mean one must be alone. As people age and move through life's milestones, our needs continuously change. Children grow up, adults usually retire from life-long careers, and spouses may sicken and even die. Elders suddenly feel voids where they once felt safety and security. Where there was once purpose and goals, now there is doubt, fear and loneliness.

In recent studies of the US Census Population Profile, approximately 32% of women over the age of 55 become widowed. Comparatively, only approximately 9% of men are widowed by the same age. After pain and grief over such a loss lessens, are seniors expected to remain alone and lonely for the remainder of their years? No. Life can be exciting again; new purpose and goals may appear as individuals continuously move through this journey called life.

While it is true that many seniors no longer exhibit the need for sexual or physical closeness, humans never lose the need for companionship, friendship, and comfort. As we evolve, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, our needs adapt as well. When we were young, helpless children, the basic needs of food and water were of primary importance. As we became young adults, the need for acceptance, finding a mate, and feeling purpose in careers and personal goal attainment followed a set pattern for our development. Then, what is the basic need for the seniors? The need to feel useful and productive remains at the top of the list, along with the satisfaction of life fulfillment and completion.

Seniors may find others with very similar needs in many places, while at the same time fulfilling this last task of self-fulfillment, to remain productive useful members of society.

Yet, how do we meet others when we are no longer able to circulate in the public workplace on a consistent basis, or may be unable to drive independently? What of the increasing number of physical limitations that cause us to fatigue more easily than ever before? Start simple. Do you belong to a church or other social group? Do you make frequent trips to the store, the library, or the Laundromat?

The Laundromat? Yes! Did you know that many seniors meet future friends and mates at, of all places, the well-known Laundromat? (It may seem ironic that the old college ruse to congregate there to meet others has never died!) Frequented places that serve to meet weekly basic needs are the best places for singles of all ages to meet.

Church groups and volunteer organizations also remain at the top of the list as likely places to meet others and ensures commonalities for persons of like beliefs to meet, and strengthen bonds of friendship, and even develop new bonds.

Community and senior event planners often schedule dances, dinners, and speakers to entertain and inform communities on a regular basis. A good way to access this type of information would be to contact the local Chamber of Commerce office in your area for a listing of monthly events offered by the city or township in which you live.

As in all aspects of daily living, and dating, especially with vulnerable adults, caution is advised. Safety should be a top priority at all times, until trust and honesty is established. Just because you're a senior doesn't mean you've forgotten such basics, and despite the passage of time, basic requirements in a mate still apply.

Do not give out personal information to someone you just met. Meet in groups if possible for the first few times and take it slow. Dating in the senior years holds all the allure and excitement as it did during your teen years, but with added experience and patience, new relationships will help maintain youthfulness and a sense of purpose until the day we die.

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Ms. Ellison recently retired from the Government Accountability Office after 37 years of service. A graduate of George Mason University, she devoted the majority of her career to working with senior level auditors from around the world who came to participate in GAO 's International Auditor Training Program. In retirement she is enjoying traveling, writing and spending time with her family.