

Church Name

Jane Doe, RN, FCN

ASSISTING OLDER ADULTS WITH TELEPHONE USE

Several conditions which may accompany aging make communication by means of the telephone more difficult: vision impairment, hearing loss, and impaired finger dexterity. Preserving the older adult's ability to communicate not contributes to his/her safety, but will enhance self-esteem and help to prevent social isolation and depression which often accompanies aging. For older adults who live alone and depend on the telephone in emergency situations, telephone equipment that they can easily activate is essential.

Here are some of the types of equipment that are available to help older adults with impairments manage the telephone:

- Amplified telephones which make the caller's voice or the voice of the person receiving the call louder.
- Telephones that flash a light instead of ringing.
- Large and extra large key pad telephones (or a giant push-button adaptor to clamp over existing push-button telephone buttons).
- Hearing aid compatible phones.
- Telephones that announce each number as dialed.
- Braille telephones.
- Talking telephones buttons.
- Telephones with memory-dialing picture buttons.
- Telephones which allow the older adult to read conversation in text.
- Voice recognition dialing.
- Voice-activated answering capability.

Resources for adaptive telephone equipment:

- For a home assessment to determine the vision- or hearing-impaired older adult's adaptive telephone needs contact **Vision Loss Resources**. A merger of two long-standing organizations, the Minneapolis Society for the Blind and St. Paul Society for the blind, Vision Loss Resources offers:
 - In-home assessment
 - In-home vision evaluation
 - Peer counseling
 - Support groups
 - Life skill classes
 - Community education
 - Hearing assessments, screening, advocacy, and resources for adaptive equipment for persons with hearing loss.

Contact information: www.visionlossresources.org; e-mail: info@vlrw.org; 651-224-7662 or 612-871-2222 (OVER).

- **TED (Telephone Equipment Distribution) Program:** A program of the Minnesota Department of Human Services that provides telephone equipment to people who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, speech impaired or have a physical disability and need adaptive equipment in order to use the phone. Equipment is loaned out at no cost as a long-term loan. Check TED's website for information: ted.program@state.mm.us.
- Adaptive telephones: Search the internet using "Adaptive telephone equipment."
- For information about Telecommunication Relay Services for the hearing-impaired (711 service) go to this web site: <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/trs.html>; or <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/711.html>.
- For a partial list of companies that sell adaptive telephone equipment for visually impaired persons go to: <http://www.accessible-devices.com/sources.html>.

Other Tips regarding telephone use applicable to the older adult:

- Provide the older adult with a cordless phone to keep beside his/her chair. This will prevent falls which may result from the older adult's getting up too quickly to answer the telephone. A telephone with a long cord is not recommended because the cord becomes a tripping hazard.
- Provide a standard corded phone for the older adult as a back-up in the event of a power failure.
- Provide the older adult with a message machine so he/she can pick up the phone only if it is a legitimate call, or it is if affordable for the older adult, subscribe to caller ID so that the he/she does not need to pick up the phone if the number is not recognizable.
- Register the older adult's phone number on the DO NOT CALL list to avoid many marketing calls. Go to <https://www.donotcall.gov/> for the National Do Not Call Registry.
- If it is hard for the older adult to read the Yellow Pages and he/she does not want to pay for 411 calls, use this number for no-cost directory assistance: 1-800-GOOG-411 or 1-800-4664-411. Find information about this service online at: <http://www.google.com/goog411>.