

Elder Companion: Overview¹

Muthusami Kumaran²

The Elder Companion Training Program

The [Elder Companion training program](#) is designed to train persons interested in becoming employed by local service providers as sitter/companions for the elderly. The objective of the program is to help participants develop the necessary skills to provide high-quality care including: assistance with daily living activities, home management services, and companionship for the elderly adult.

This training course is preparatory to studying to become a certified nursing assistant (CNA).

In the Elder Companion training program, the following topics are addressed:

- Lesson 1 Roles and Responsibilities
- Lesson 2 Aging
- Lesson 3 Communication
- Lesson 4 Nutrition
- Lesson 5 Home Maintenance and Safety
- Lesson 6 Stress Management
- Lesson 7 Time Management
- Lesson 8 Leisure Activities
- Lesson 9 Getting a Job

In addition to the nine topics that are taught as Lessons 1 through 9 in a classroom setting, training program participants will be required to make a field observation at an elder care facility. An Agent's guide and observation form are provided in **Attachment 1**.

Assumptions about the Elder Companion Training

The Elder Companion Curriculum is designed to serve as a training guide for use by Extension faculty or other professionals with expertise in the subject or content and type of learning activities to be used.

The design of the training should be individualized to meet the needs of the local job market for elder sitters/companions.

Training can be delivered in an approximate time frame of 35-40 hours with a minimum of 5 hours being a field observation at an elder care facility. Teaching/learning activities include short lectures, group discussions, demonstrations, skills practices, role playing, written exercises and hands-on experiences for work with the elderly.

The Elder Companion Training will be used to train people for employment by service providers/agencies. The initial cost of liability insurance and bonding make self-employment prohibitive for most participants.

If the service provider/agency that employs the Elder Companion is required to provide a privacy practices notification in compliance with the Health Insurance Portability Act (HIPAA), it is their responsibility to send the notice to the client.

All participants will be required to sign the form releasing the University of Florida of any liability.

Participants who complete a minimum of 30 hours of class time and the field observation will receive a completion certificate from the agency providing the training.

Program Planning and Implementation Guide

1. Contact your area/local agency on aging. They can provide information on the employers in your area.
2. Assemble a group of people who will be hiring people as elder companions. Involve them in identification of
 - requirements for employment;
 - training needs; and
 - job availability.
3. The following curriculum of this series is available on the ASK IFAS website:
 - Role/Responsibility of a Companion
 - Sensitivity to Aging
 - Communication Skills
 - Time and Stress Management
 - Managing Nutritional Needs
 - Home Maintenance
 - Using Leisure Time
 - Getting a Job as an Elder Companion

4. Compare local needs and requirements with what Cooperative Extension or other agencies are prepared to offer. Using this information, develop a plan of action.
5. Determine how potential trainees will be identified. Will they be screened for interest in working with the elderly? Will they do background checks?
6. Determine the dates, location and persons who will be involved with the training (i.e., instructors, resource persons). Confirm any outside instructors who will take part in the training. Identify the locations for clients to complete their field observations and confirm dates and times.
7. Duplicate any materials needed for the training. Handouts should be provided for each participant. These are a part of each lesson and are designed to be used as overheads.
8. Conduct the training.
9. Give Pre-tests before each lesson and Post-tests after each lesson to determine how much knowledge each participant absorbed. **(See Attachment 2.)**
10. After the training, issue certificates to individuals who complete the training. It will be necessary to keep an attendance record for each participant to insure that they complied with the completion requirements. **(See Attachment 3.)**
11. At the final session, have clients evaluate the training program. Evaluation forms are provided in **Attachment 4.**

Selection Process Considerations

Background Screening

Many of the companion/sitter jobs being advertised require background screening, drug testing and clearance by the Florida Abuse Registry under the Department of Children and Families. When taking a position with a service provider and/or agency, the background check and abuse registry requirements must be met within five days of the person going to work. There is a nominal fee for the background check.

It would seem reasonable that part of the screening process should be to eliminate people who are known to be drug users, or who have criminal or physically/mentally abusive backgrounds. This elimination process will avoid raising false hopes for obtaining employment. Some of the local providers for the job training are going to require the background checks as a prerequisite to participation in the training. Other sites will allow anyone to be trained and require the background checks as a condition of employment.

Issuing a letter along with the completion certificate will serve as a reference for future employment. The letter will state that the background checks, drug use and abuse register clearance are the responsibility of the employer. A

sample of this letter follows for your use and/or adaptation.

Sample Letter to Prospective Employers

Dear _____:

Attached you will find a list of persons who have successfully completed the 35-hour Elder Companion Class. The content of the training included: sensitivity to aging, communication, nutrition, home maintenance and safety, time and stress management, and leisure activities for elderly clients. They have received their certificate of completion as of (date).

Also enclosed is a copy of their resumes, to familiarize you with their experience and background.

These graduates are trained caregivers whom you may choose to recommend as you receive requests for someone with these skills. We encourage you to suggest that your clients follow through with screening procedures by checking references, completing a background check, etc., since this is not a prerequisite for our class.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (____) _____.

Sincerely,

Program Instructor

Desirable Skills

Many of the jobs being advertised require the following skills/resources as a condition for employment:

- **Ability to Read:** The newspaper, the mail, directions on prescription bottles, preparation instructions for food, use of cleaning supplies.
- **Valid Driver's License:** To drive the elderly client to doctor appointments and/or the store.
- **Reliable Transportation:** To get to work and arrive on time.

With the exception of ability to read, these are not requirements to participate in the training, but they would make the person more employable.

Desire to be Elder Companion

Working as an elder companion/sitter is not suitable employment for every individual. Even though there is an increasing need, placing the wrong person in a position with elderly clients could create a potentially harmful situation. It is highly desirable that only participants who are interested or have some experience in this type of employment be trained as Elder Companions.

Suggested Program Outline

This is a suggested outline for the Elder Companion program. It can be adjusted as needed. Time frames allocated will depend on the size of the class. You and your community resource person or other collaborator will determine the amount of time during any given day that the clients can attend training. It may only be possible for a half day and not for an entire 8 hour day.

DAY ONE

Roles and Responsibilities
Aging

DAY TWO

Communication
Nutrition

DAY THREE

Home Maintenance and Safety
Stress Management
Time Management

DAY FOUR

Leisure Activities
Getting a Job

DAY FIVE

Field Observation

Table 1. Day one suggested daily schedule.

Time	Content	Resource Person(s)
8:30–9:45	Welcome Registration Get-acquainted Overview & Objectives Agreement	County Faculty
9:45–10:30	Introduction to the Job	
10:30–10:45	Break	
10:45–12:00 noon	Introduction to the Job (continues) • Clients' Rights • Roles and Responsibilities • Personal Appearance • Personal Qualities • Ethics • Do's and Don'ts • Emergency Situations • Daily Activity Log	County Faculty and person from hiring agency
12:00 noon–1:00	Lunch	
1:00–3:00	Aging • Who Are the Elderly? • Facts about Older Americans	County Faculty; person from Area Local Agency on Aging
3:00–3:15	Break	
3:15–4:30	Aging (continues) • Physical Changes of the Elderly • Elder Abuse	County Faculty; person from Area Local Agency on Aging

Table 2. Day two suggested daily schedule.

Time	Content	Resource Person(s)
8:30–10:30	Communication with the Elderly Communication Process Basic Human Needs Self-Awareness Sending A Message	County Faculty
10:30–10:45	Break	
10:45–12:00 noon	Communication (continues) Active Listening Physical and Emotional Blocks to Communication	County Faculty
12:00 noon–1:00	Lunch	

Time	Content	Resource Person(s)
1:00–3:15	Managing Nutrition Nutritional Health Food Guide Pyramid Are My Hands Clean? How to Measure Food Safety Guidelines	County Faculty; local dietitian

Table 3. Day three suggested daily schedule.

Time	Content	Resource Person(s)
8:30–10:30	Home Maintenance and Safety What Is Clean? Keeping the Client's Home Clean Organizing for Cleanliness	County Faculty
10:30–10:45	Break	
10:45–12:00 noon	Home Maintenance (continues) Managing the Laundry Sanitation Procedures Safety Agreement with Client	County Faculty and person who works doing home maintenance
12:00 noon–1:00	Lunch	
1:00–3:00	Stress Management Stress ... What Is Yours? Warning Signs of Stress Job Stress for the Elder Companion Strategies to Deal with Stressors	County Faculty, Psychologist, Mental Health Professional
3:00–3:15	Break	
3:15–4:30	Time Management How Do I Spend My Time? Prime Time Making Better Use of My Time	County Faculty

Table 4. Day four suggested daily schedule.

Time	Content	Resource Person(s)
8:30–10:30	Leisure Activities Purposes of Leisure Activity for the Elderly Possible Activities for My Client	County Faculty and/or Recreation Staff Member
10:30–10:45	Break	
10:45–12:00 noon	Leisure Time Exercises Simple Exercises to Use with Clients	Exercise Physiologist

Time	Content	Resource Person(s)
12:00 noon–1:00	Lunch	
1:00–3:00	Obtaining Employment Things I Like About Me What Do Employers Look For? Resume Writing and Application Completion Getting Letters of Reference	County Faculty and employer of Elder Companions
3:00–3:15	Break	
3:15–4:30	The Interview Process Preparing for the Interview The Job Interview Contract for the Elder Companion	County Faculty or Human Resources Director

Elder Companion Training Outcomes and Student Performance Standards

Table 5. Required Section (25 hours)—Assist in the Care of the Elderly.

Behavioral Outcome	Activities	Handouts
Describe the role of the companion in providing care and assistance to an elderly person.	View clips from <i>Driving Miss Daisy</i> video. (Available at most video rental stores.) Make a list of the roles performed by a companion	Roles and Responsibilities of the Elder Companion Guidelines for Personal Appearance Personal Qualities Ethics Client Rights
Describe the physical, social, emotional and mental changes that may take place in aging.	Sensory Exercises	Physical Changes of the Elderly and Ways to Help
Describe the special needs of the elderly.	Sensory Exercises	Physical Changes of the Elderly and Ways to Help
Identify own feelings toward the elderly.	Case Study	
Describe problems of clients with decreased mobility, decreased vision or hearing, decreased tactile acuity, low energy, and confusion.	Sensory Exercises	
Describe symptoms of abuse and neglect.	Exercise: Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly	Emergency Reporting
Review the laws in reporting abuse or neglect of an elderly person.		

Table 6. Apply Effective Human Relationships and Interactions.

Behavioral Outcome	Activities	Handouts
State four physical needs that all humans share.	Human Need Scenarios	Basic Human Needs
State three psychological needs that all humans share.		
Describe how individuals and families differ.	Case Study	
Describe the need for dignity and circumstances that contribute to loss of self-esteem in elderly.	Case Study	
Demonstrate how emotional control affects human interactions and changing relationships and/or communication.	Case Study	
Explain what is meant by communication, and what is verbal and non-verbal communication.	Exercise: Self-Awareness and Communication	Suggestions for Communicating Behaviors That Interfere with Listening
Demonstrate active listening skills. Communication skills.	Exercise: Receiving Messages Exercise: Stating and Listening to Differences Exercise: Active Listening	Suggestions for Active Listening
Demonstrate patience and techniques for working with other family members.		

Table 7. Assist Clients with Personal, Social, and Recreational Matters When Needed.

Behavioral Outcome	Activities	Handouts
Explain the importance of family and friends as part of the support system.		
Explain the role of the companion in assisting a client with social and leisure activities such as reading, board games, music, or other social and recreational activities.		Possible Activities
Identify accountability tools to show interaction with the clients ...daily log/schedules.		Daily Log
Demonstrate Exercises for Older Adults.	Role Playing of Exercises for Older Adults	Exercises for Older Adults
Describe client's need for privacy and confidentiality.	Case Study	

Table 8. Assist in Maintaining a Safe and Sanitary Environment for Clients and Provide Personal Care Services for Clients.

Behavioral Outcome	Activities	Handouts
Demonstrate proper hand washing techniques.	Hand washing exercise using black light.	When to Wash?
Demonstrate proper storage and preparation of hot and cold foods.	Practice Demonstration Safety in the Kitchen Check Sheets on Kitchen Hazards	Prevent Food Poisoning, Food Safety and Storage
Describe how the spread of disease is controlled in the home in relation to kitchens, bathrooms, laundry, dusting and food handling. Demonstrate sanitation as it relates to laundry; if the person has an accident and soils themselves or bed, action has to be taken.	What Is Clean? Tools to Do the Job Cleaning Agents to Do the Job How to Clean Organizing to Get the Work Done	Household Tasks— Rules of Organization House Cleaning Plan Weekly Plan for Household Cleaning
Describe emergency response: phone numbers, directions to the house, fire extinguishers.	Role play emergency situation	Emergency Reporting
Identify safety measures necessary for maintaining a safe environment such as clear traffic areas or walkways, loose rugs, electricity and safety bars.	View pictures and/or video that illustrate home hazards and identify them.	Household Safety Checklist Safety for Older Adults
Provide Personal Care Services for Clients		
Explain the difference between administering medication and assisting with medication.	Role playing assistance with medication	Do's and Don'ts

Table 9. Demonstrate Stress Management.

Behavioral Outcome	Activities	Handouts
Identify factors that create negative stress and explain how they affect behavior. (Needs to include alcohol.)	Know Your Stressors Warning Signals of Stress	Stress Diary Check for Behavior Warning Signals
Describe methods of managing stress such as diets, leisure activities and exercise.	Role play what can be done for stress management	Steps to Manage Stress Handout on Exercise Handout on Leisure Activities
Explain how problem-solving techniques help in stress management.	Stressful Situations Scenarios	Stress for an Elder Companion

Table 10. Demonstrate Employability Skills.

Behavioral Outcome	Activities	Handouts
Look for a job.	Things I Like About Me	
Secure information about a job; skills and training required by the job.	Job Search	
Describe documents that may be required when applying for a job. Information needed to apply for a job.	Resume Writing The Application	
Complete a job application form correctly.	The Application	
Demonstrate competence in job interview techniques. (Do's and Don'ts in the interview.)	Preparing for a Job Interview	Questions You Can Ask Questions Not to Ask
Identify acceptable work habits. (No smoking.)	What Do I Have to Offer	
Demonstrate acceptable employee health habits.		
Write a resume for this specific job.	Resume Writing	My Practice Resume
Identify personal characteristics desired for working with people.	What Are Employers Seeking?	Top 20 Positive Characteristics Employers Are Seeking
Participate in a Field Observation program with someone who is an Elder Companion (5 Hours)		

OPTIONAL SECTIONS (7 hours is required in one of the following areas)

Table 11. Provide Basic Homemaker Services to Client and Family.

Behavioral Outcome	Activities	Handouts
Identify a logical order for performing tasks to save time and energy.	Organizing to Get the Job Done	Housekeeping Task—Rules of Organization Household Cleaning Schedule Weekly Plan for Household Cleaning
Demonstrate correct procedures for basic household cleaning tasks performed daily, weekly, monthly, and occasionally.	What Is Clean? How to Clean	How to Clean
Demonstrate correct procedures for selection, use, care and storage of supplies and equipment.	Tools to Do the Job Cleaning Agents to Do the Job	
Demonstrate correct procedures for laundry including stain removal.	Managing the Laundry	Eight Basic Steps to Clean Laundry

Table 12. Develop Plans for Meeting Nutritional Needs of Clients and Families.

Behavioral Outcome	Activities	Handouts
Evaluate own diet for one week in relation to the Food Guide Pyramid	Nutritional Health The Food Guide Pyramid	What Did you Eat?
Assistance with preparation and serving of foods or meals according to the Food Guide Pyramid considering client's cultural preferences and personal needs.	When Do I Wash?	
Apply the principles of special diets that may be used in the plan for care of the client; i.e., measure food accurately by using correct procedures and equipment.	How Do I Measure?	
Explain ways to assist a client with feeding without feeding the client.		Do's and Don'ts
Apply the principles of food safety and storage.	Keeping Food Safe	Smart Not Sorry—Keep Food Safety in Mind Prevent Food Poisoning

Adapted by Extension Professionals attending Elder Companion Training, March, 1999. Original source: Florida Department of Education, Curriculum Framework, Elderly and Disabled Care Services, July 1998.

Table 13. Elder Companion Teaching Activities.

Roles and Responsibilities	Home Maintenance and Safety	Leisure Activities
Overview of Training	What Is Clean?	Why Engage in Leisure Activities?
Roles and Responsibilities	Tools to Do the Job	Leisure Activities for the Elderly
Do's and Don'ts for the Elder Companion	Cleaning Agents to Do the Job	Exercises for Older Adults
Handling Emergencies	How to Clean	Getting the Job
Clients' Rights	Organizing to Get the Job Done	Things I Like About Me
Aging	Managing the Laundry	What Are Employers Seeking?
Who Are the Elderly?	General Home Safety	Job Search
Physical Changes	Safety in the Kitchen	Resume Writing
Elder Abuse	Stress Management	The Application
Communication	What Is Your Stress?	Preparing for a Job Interview
Basic Human Needs	Warning Signals of Stress	Interview Questions You Might Be Asked
Self Awareness/Sending Messages	Handling Stress	The Job Interview
Active Listening	Stress for the Elder Companion	Sample Contract for the Elder Companion
Nutrition	Time Management	Field Observation
Nutritional Health	Time Analysis	Field Observation (5 hours)
The Food Guide Pyramid	Prime Time	Debriefing the Observation
How Do I Wash My Hands?	Organizing Time	
How Do I Measure?		
Food Safety		

Credits and Acknowledgments

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The curriculum was developed by Linda D. Cook, former professor, UF/IFAS Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, and revised for electronic publication by Elizabeth B. Bolton, professor of community development, UF/IFAS Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences.

Parts of the Elder Companion program were adapted from the Home Care Companion program first developed by the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, Auburn University, and the Senior Series developed by the Center for Rural Elderly and the University of Missouri.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1

Agent Guide Field Observation

Time: 5 hours ...all at one time/or at various intervals in the training.

Introduction: The best way to see what the job of Elder Companion will be like is to shadow someone for a period of time during their work day. We have arranged for each of you to make a field observation in the community. After your field observation, we will reconvene to discuss what you observed.

DO:

- Review with the Elder Companion trainees the Field Observation Sheet.
- Discuss conduct that is appropriate for a field observation.
- Send trainees to their field observation.

REFLECT:

- What was the Elder Companion/Sitter doing with the client while you were present?

- What was the relationship between the elderly person and the companion?
- Would you have done anything differently?
- What did the companion do well?
- What did you learn?

APPLY:

- How will you use this in your work as an elder companion?

Field Observation Sheet

Date of Field Observation:

Location of Field Observation:

List of the Job Responsibilities Observed:

Describe the elderly person being cared for:

Describe the relationship between the elderly person and the companion:

List things that you learned during the Field Observation:

Identify any areas where you would have dealt with the situation differently:

Name of Person Observed:

Name of Person Doing the Observation:

Attachment 2

Knowledge Tests: Roles and Responsibilities

Name: _____

Date: _____

Agent Fill In:

Pre Test - Post Test (Circle one)

T F A companion always knows what is best for the client.

T F A companion may wear the same clothes two days in a row if the clothes don't look dirty.

T F A companion's shoes should not have open toes or high heels.

T F It's always okay for a companion to wear perfume.

T F When caring for elderly clients, you should encourage self-care and independence.

In dealing with the client's medicines, a companion should NEVER:

____(a) put pills in a client's mouth.

____(b) hand the client a medicine bottle when asked.

____(c) remind a client when to take a medicine.

____(d) tell the person in charge if a client is not taking medicine.

Name two responsibilities that a companion may have.

Knowledge Tests: Aging

Name: _____

Date: _____

Agent Fill In:

Pre Test—Post Test (Circle one)

T F Elderly people are all alike.

T F Changes in hearing can affect a person's behavior.

T F As we age, our bones are more brittle and more likely to break.

T F Older people have some of the same basic human needs as do young people.

Name three senses that aging affects.

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

Name two steps to take in an emergency situation.

(a) _____

(b) _____

Knowledge Tests: Communication

Name: _____

Date: _____

Agent Fill In:

Pre Test—Post Test (Circle one)

T F For good communication, it is important to listen well.

To improve communication with persons who have a hearing problem, you can do which of the following? (Check as many as apply.)

- ___(a) speak at a shout.
- ___(b) speak clearly in a moderate voice.
- ___(c) vary the loudness and tone of your voice.
- ___(d) face the person directly.
- ___(e) talk faster.

Knowledge Tests: Nutrition

Name: _____

Date: _____

Agent Fill In:

Pre Test—Post Test (Circle one)

T F Hand washing is very important in preventing the spread of disease.

Older people may not eat well because:

- ___(a) they can't afford the right food.
- ___(b) they are physically unable to shop and prepare food.
- ___(c) they don't like eating alone.
- ___(d) all of the above.

Name three occasions when the companion should wash her/his hands.

- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____

Name three of the five major food groups.

- (a) _____
- (b) _____
- (c) _____

Knowledge Tests: Home Maintenance

Name: _____

Date: _____

Agent Fill In:

Pre Test—Post Test (Circle one)

T F Keeping a house clean means different things to different people.

T F Baking soda is good for deodorizing the refrigerator.

T F Sorting is an important step in doing laundry.

Knowledge Tests: Stress/Time Management

Name: _____

Date: _____

Agent Fill In:

Pre Test—Post Test (Circle one)

T F Stress can be both good and bad.

T F Time management helps you have more time.

T F Prime time is when the soap operas are on.

T F Sleeplessness is a warning sign of stress.

Knowledge Tests: Leisure Activities

Name: _____

Date: _____

Agent Fill In:

Pre Test—Post Test (Circle one)

T F Confused individuals are not able to enjoy recreational activities.

T F Elderly people can engage in physical activities.

T F Physical and leisure activities address the social needs of clients.

Evaluation of Training

Please complete the following to help us evaluate the Elder Companion Training.

1. Of the information presented and experiences offered, how helpful do you think each lesson will be to you? (Circle one for each lesson.)

Roles and Responsibilities

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

Aging

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

Communication

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

Nutrition

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

Home Maintenance and Safety

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

Stress Management

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

Time Management

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

Leisure Activities

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

Getting a Job

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

Field Observation

Very Helpful

Helpful

Not Helpful

2. How do you plan to use the information you learned? (Check all that apply.)

___ as an elder companion employed for wages

___ as a volunteer companion

___ to care for family member or friend

___ I probably won't use it

___ other (please explain)

3. How would you rate this program?

Excellent ___ Very Good ___ Good ___ Fair ___ Poor ___

4. What suggestions would you make for improving this program? (If you need more room, write on the back of this sheet.)

5. Have you ever attended an Extension activity before?
___ Yes ___ No

6. Would you like to receive information about other Extension educational opportunities?

Yes No

If yes, give address below.

Additional Comments:

Name (optional):

Address:

Acknowledgment

Original article written by Elizabeth B. Bolton, professor emeritus, UF/IFAS Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Gainesville, FL 32611.

