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'I felt there was no more meaning to life': Widow, 84, shares feelings of loneliness after only son moves out

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The feelings of isolation and loss made Madam L lose her appetite and sleep. *Shin Min Daily News file*



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SINGAPORE – An 84-year-old widow found the loneliness hard to bear when her son and his family first moved out.

Madam L, as she wanted to be known, depended on her son, with whom she lived after her husband died about 30 years ago. Now in his 40s, he is her only child and they enjoy a close relationship.

But he, his wife and their two children decided to move to their own place about four years ago.

She said her daughter-in-law did not want to live with her. Even when they did live together, her daughter-in-law, a very quiet person, barely spoke to her.

"I was not used to it after they moved out," she said in Mandarin. "I felt very sad and unhappy. I felt very lonely. I felt there was no more meaning to life."

To make things worse, she suffered from arthritis and found walking painful until she had knee replacement surgery.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, she stayed at home most of the time to avoid catching the virus.

She retired as a cleaner in her 60s after she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Most of her friends have died or are too frail to visit her.

The feelings of isolation and loss made her lose her appetite and sleep.

Madam L feared she was slipping into depression.

With her son's encouragement, she sought counselling at Care Corner Singapore. Since 2021, the social service agency has provided free counselling for seniors who use its services or programmes to help them cope with the grief and losses they face as they age.

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In January 2023, it will offer this service to the public living in Toa Payoh, Marsiling and Woodland. It hopes to offer the service islandwide eventually.

Through the counselling sessions, Madam L learnt not to take to heart her distant relationship with her daughter-in-law. They



also helped her realise that she continues to enjoy a close relationship with her son, who eats dinner with her at her flat nearly every day.

Her counsellor, Mr Philip Chan, said: "I helped her to change her perspective from thinking she has lost her son (after he moved out) to that he still cares for and visits her."

She also keeps herself active, spending her days exercising or chatting with other seniors, and joining activities at the Care Corner Active Ageing Centre in Toa Payoh, where she lives.

"It's important that we make friends and chat with others. Now my mood is much better," she said.

"I told my son that if one day I can no longer walk, I would stay at an old folks' home as I don't want to burden him. He is married and he has to take care of his own family," she added.

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