Tech savvy kids help granny and granddad with gadget glitches

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Older, retired people can't call the IT department when their mobile phone fails, or their computer randomly shuts down. Instead, children and grandchildren often step in and help with ever-updating tech.

New research shows that creating quiet moments for this transfer of knowledge is crucial and something that [older people](link) tend to both cherish and benefit from.

Carolina Martinez, senior lecturer in child and youth studies at Malmö University in Sweden, has interviewed 70- to 94-year-olds about success factors and obstacles when it comes to learning about [digital media](link) from [younger generations](link).

"The study shows that children and [grandchildren](link) have an important role in supporting older people in developing digital skills. It is interesting to see how detailed stories they have about these rather everyday events," says Martinez, adding:

"It was striking how active the older people I interviewed are to bring about moments of learning. For example, one man told us that he carefully planned to ask about how the camera on the mobile phone works during a walk with his daughter and grandchildren. He thought that it would be natural to talk about it then, and at the same time be a quiet time together."

The [older generation](link) know that children and grandchildren have many other commitments, yet they choose to take care of them instead of prioritizing their own needs, says Martinez.

For older people who want to learn—which is important to maintain independence—it is important to have the opportunity to try things for themselves.

"If you don't get involved, you don't have the opportunity to learn. It is a basic principle for all learning.

"The greatest opportunity for learning is when communication works

well. It is when there is a relaxed atmosphere, the child or grandchild calmly demonstrates step by step and maybe follows up with clear notes. Simplifying and making the information manageable is important."

The fact that the older people often live in their own households and are far from the younger family members is another obstacles to learning. It may also be that children and grandchildren cannot make the information manageable or are not as knowledgeable about the particular mobile phone that the older person has.

"There is also a big difference between getting help and learning. Getting help getting something fixed is one thing, which shouldn't be underestimated either, but getting help learning is another."

She believes that the older generation lack natural forums to learn about digital media.

"Children have a whole system with the school around their learning. And many adults in working life can call the IT department when something goes wrong. But pensioners have no system around them. Of course there are courses but not a good structure. No one in society takes responsibility for their learning from digital media."

Provided by Malmö University