

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

When It’s Time to Step In: Convincing Older Parents to Get Extra Help

As your parents age and begin showing signs of trouble caring for themselves, convincing mom or dad to accept help can be frustrating and emotionally draining. While there are hundreds of excellent community support services out there, many seniors are reluctant to take advantage of them.

Extra support can be a very sensitive subject, especially if your parents take a lot of pride in doing things for themselves. But as difficult as it may be, it’s important to have the conversation as soon as you see signs that cause you concern. Waiting too long to seek help or backing down at the first sign of resistance can put your loved ones’ health and well-being at risk.

Here are some tips to help you tactfully raise the suggestion of outside support, and get your parents on-board to accept the assistance they need:

Do your homework. Before you sit down with one or both parents, take some time to think about your specific concerns. Ask yourself what type of care your loved ones might need, and research support services in your community.

Advance preparation will better prepare you to handle any concerns or objections.

Have a heart to heart. Meet with your parents in a comfortable, distraction-free environment where you can openly and honestly discuss your concerns. Express your desire for their well-being and offer specific examples of the situations that worry you.

Listen carefully. During the conversation, pay close attention to any objections your parents raise. Use this information to adapt your arguments and change your suggestions to better suit your loved ones’ needs. Show parents you understand and appreciate their concerns, but firmly state why you think they need extra help and how it will benefit them.

Decide together. It can be hard for your parents to accept help from a person they haven’t met or an organization they don’t know. Arrange for your mom or dad to meet with the service provider, whether it’s a housekeeper, personal support worker or yard maintenance crew. As much as possible, get your parents involved in the research and decision-making process. They’ll be much more likely to accept support if they have input and control in choosing the service providers.

Involve siblings and other relatives who have an interest in your parents’ care. The support of aging parents can be a heated issue in some families and getting everyone’s participation from the beginning can minimize conflict now and down the road.

Start small. If parents aren’t willing to accept all of the extra support you think they need, try suggesting a minimal, low-commitment service. For example, you might recommend a weekly house cleaner or transportation service to doctor’s appointments. Once your parents get used to the idea of receiving help, they’ll be more open to other types of assistance.

Don’t give up. There’s a chance your mom or dad might refuse help, or even refuse to discuss the subject the first time you bring it up. If this happens, keep raising the issue and gather as much
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supporting evidence for your position as you can. With persistence, your parents will gradually start to see the value in extra support.

But keep in mind that as long as your parents are legally capable, the final decision on any support services will ultimately be theirs. Sometimes, you may just have to live with their decision to refuse non-essential support, and focus your attention on the larger issues.

Get professional help. A qualified expert can offer an impartial assessment of the situation, provide counselling services and connect you with local resources. If the topic of extra support is causing a lot of tension in the family, consider talking with your parent about bringing in a social worker, geriatric care manager or other professional.

The excellent support services available today allow many seniors to live independently longer while leading active, vibrant lives. While it's never easy to bring up the subject of extra help to a parent who is aging, the conversation is a necessary one. With the right approach, you'll get your parents the help they need to maximize their quality of life and minimize your own worries.