

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

Knowing How to Help Aging Parents

As adult children, we often feel concerned and helpless as we notice changes taking place with our aging parents. This concern can be sparked by a realization that our parent’s house isn't as clean as it used to be, the grass hasn't been cut or that there isn't enough food in the fridge. We may become concerned with their health or their ability to think clearly.

As we begin to worry about how our aging parents can take care of themselves, we begin to feel the parent-child roles reversing. We may suddenly be put in the position of providing not only assistance with errands or grass cutting, but actually helping with our parent's day-to-day care. Here are some strategies that can help you or a family member successfully take on the role of caregiver.

Strategies

It's important to ensure that in trying to help your parent, you don't threaten or even destroy their sense of independence. Keep in mind that it is their choice to accept or reject your help.

- It's important not to make assumptions based on what you are observing. You may feel your parent’s house isn't as clean as it should be; but they may be busy with other activities.
- Discuss any concerns you may have about your parent's ability to care for themselves or their home.
- Ask if there are specific difficulties that your parent is having with certain tasks. For example, light housework may not be a problem but your parent may have difficulties with more physical tasks like clearing snow or scrubbing floors.
- If your parent assures you that you are worrying unnecessarily, keep an eye on things without intruding.
- Keep communication open—talk to your parent again when the season changes. Your parent may be fine during the summer but may need help with errands when the snow comes. Conversely, your parent may be happy to cope in winter but may need assistance with summer yard duties.

Offer Suggestions

- If you think your parent may need help, suggest ideas supportively. Let them know, for example, that agencies exist to help seniors with light housekeeping and other home maintenance jobs such as snow shovelling or grass cutting. Many of these agencies provide services at a nominal cost for those on limited incomes.
- If your parent admits to difficulties that you can't help with, discuss the situation with your parent and come up with solutions together. Your parent's dignity will remain intact if they feel they are a part of the solution.
- Discuss whether neighborhood students might be able to help with grass cutting or snow removal.
- Take the lead from your parent—try to let them maintain control of their own destiny, provided that their safety or health isn't threatened.

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When a Parent Doesn't Want Your Help

- Be prepared for some resistance and try to understand your parent's reluctance to accept your assistance. Any loss of independence can be difficult, and help signals the loss of independence.
- Remember that the ability to make choices is just as important as we get older. Losing the ability to make choices can have a great impact on an older adult's sense of well-being.
- Recognize that it is their choice whether they will accept or reject offers of help. Certain exceptions do apply—if you are concerned that the older adult is incapable of making their own decisions as a result of a health condition such as dementia or other cognitive impairment, you may have to make decisions for them.

Becoming a caregiver involves many changes for both you and your loved one. If you are feeling overwhelmed with your new responsibilities, contact a professional for advice, guidance and assistance. They can help you to ensure your loved ones receive the care they require, while still maintaining a healthy and loving relationship with each other.