

Exploring Eldercare

It's always to difficult to come to the realization that your parent or other aged loved one suddenly needs help taking care of themselves. After all, our older relatives typically spent their lives taking care of us. The time comes, however, when we realize that our elderly loved ones are no longer able to take care of themselves. Roles are reversed, and suddenly, we are forced to make important life decisions for them.

It may be difficult to determine whether or not your loved one is ready for eldercare services, especially if you do not live nearby or you do not see them that frequently. Additionally, though some elderly people do need help, they might be hesitant to ask for it; some may directly refuse. So how do you know when a loved one is in need of care? It is essential that you visit their home and spend some good, quality time to determine whether or not they do need eldercare. Consider the following:

Signs an Aging Loved One Might Need Care

- **Increasing Forgetfulness:** Does the person forget to pay bills, or forget common household duties? Have they left the oven or stove on? Do they remember the date or year? Do they have trouble remembering family members?
- **Weight loss:** Has the person lost a great deal of weight? Do they seem more frail than the last time you saw them?
- **Messy Home/Lack of Cleanliness:** Does the home seem to lack order? Does it have an odor? Is the garbage taken out, are newspapers put away? Does the person bathe on a regular basis?
- **Low Food Supply:** Does the person have enough food to eat? Are the supplies spoiled?
- **Low Medicine Supply or Misuse of Medicine:** Does the person know how and what

medicines to self administer? Are all of their medicines up to date? Have they been to the doctor recently?

- **Diagnosis of Serious Medical Problem:** Has your loved one been diagnosed with a disease such as Alzheimer's disease, dementia, or cancer? Do they require regular, professional medical attention? If they live with a loved one (such as a spouse) can the spouse take care them adequately?
- **Loneliness/Depression:** Does the person have regular visitors? Do they see family or friends? Have they recently been widowed?
- **Loss of Mobility:** Can the person move adequately enough to get to the restroom or into the shower? Does the person get any regular activity?
- **Confusion:** Does the person know who you are? Do they know who they are?
- **Inability to Drive/Transportation Issues:** Is the person still driving? Is it safe? Are they able to run errands such as shopping or going to the doctor safely?

If your loved one is having difficulty with any of these issues, it is may time to consider some form of eldercare for your loved one.

Providing Eldercare for Your Loved One

If, after spending time with your loved one, you realize that they do need care, you must investigate all the options available to your family. First, you must meet with your loved one and discuss your concerns with them in an open and loving way. Let them know that you care about them and want to help them live in the best quality of life possible. If the person is no longer capable of making decisions for themselves, you may have to appoint yourself with durable power of attorney. Basically, you are working in your loved one's best interest. For more information, you can contact a legal advisor.

Eldercare Options

Once you and your loved one agree that they do need care, you must investigate the options for eldercare in your area. There are a variety of different possibilities, but based on their needs as well as financial considerations you may decide upon one of the following forms of care:

- **Care by Family Member:** Many elderly people prefer to have their family members take care of them. This may involve some logistical challenges. For example, will the elderly person move to their family's home, or will a family member move into their home? Many elderly people do not wish to move, so this may be the least disruptive form of eldercare available, but becoming a caregiver can be challenging, stressful, and emotionally-trying. If an elderly person has severe medical problems, a family member may not be the best person to provide care.
- **In-Home Care:** Some seniors may not require as much help as others. There are a variety of companies that are bonded and insured that provide hourly assistance to seniors. This can be great if the person only needs help part of the day with chores, personal care, and does not have a serious medical problem. However, even if the company is bonded and insured, act as your relative's advocate. It's up to you to research the company and meet with the caregivers that will be assisting your relative. Twenty-four-hour in-home care is also available for those who need it. Again, make sure to research the company, and make your presence known. While 24-hour care can be a good option and allow an elderly person the freedom to continue living in their own home, it can also be very expensive.
- **Senior Living Complexes:** Senior complexes offer a good middle ground between nursing home facilities and 24-hour home

care. Seniors have the privacy of their own apartment but the benefit of on-site medical care. Additional services may include personal care (such as help with bathing), medicine distribution, meals, and if your loved one is really lonely, these complexes do offer a sense of community. Many of these complexes can be more economical than 24-hour home care.

- **Nursing Homes:** Nursing homes are a final choice for people in search of eldercare. They typically house seniors who have more medical challenges and are less independent than the seniors who can live in senior apartment complexes. Many nursing homes are affordable for patients on a budget. Medical supervision is quite predominant in these homes.

Based on your loved one's financial constraints, you can help them decide which choice is best for them. If possible, take your loved on a tour of the facilities you are considering together. Let them meet the staff and meet the other residents. Empower your loved one to be a part of the decision-making process.

Become Your Loved One's Advocate

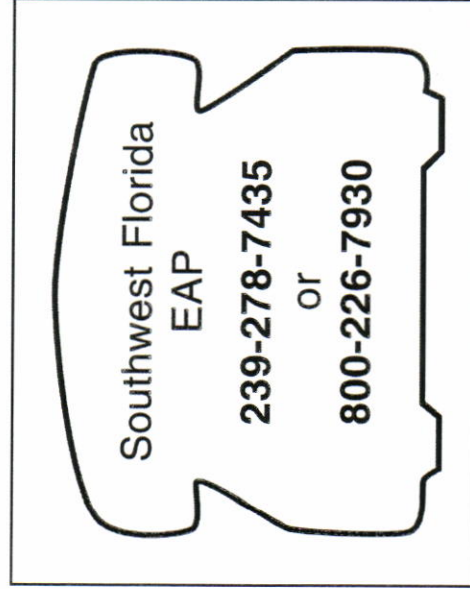
As your loved one ages, it becomes your responsibility to look out for their best interests. As previously mentioned, it is crucial that you research the companies that may provide care for your loved one in their home or outside of it. Sadly, elderly people are often victims of crimes such as theft and/or neglect. Do what you can to keep a close eye on your loved one's finances. Purchase a lock box for their valuables such as jewelry, money and heirlooms, and keep a key for yourself. Additionally, if your loved one is taking prescription medications that can be abused (such as pain or anxiety medicine) count the pills and lock up the medicine as well. If you

are not living with your loved one, make sure you visit as often as you can, and keep a close eye on your loved one.

If they plan on living in their own home instead of relocating, make sure they have good working locks on their doors and windows. Install other safety devices such as fire alarms and extinguishers as needed, and make a list of important phone numbers (such as family members, doctors, etc.) and display it in a prominent area for caregivers in case of an emergency.

Help Is Available

Considering eldercare for loved one can be a stressful and emotional process, but sometimes just talking about your problems leads to new solutions. If you or someone you know needs information, guidance or help, contact the resource number listed below or look online for local professionals who can help.



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