

Aging Wisely™

Comprehensive Care Management and Consultation

Am I in Denial? How to Know When Your Parent May Need Help/Planning to Avoid a Crisis

It is human nature to be resilient and strong, and therefore not want to recognize our own weaknesses, or especially weaknesses in our loved ones. This is especially true as our parents age and we are faced with their mortality and the truth that we may need to step in to a caregiving role. How do you balance providing help and making sure a loved one is safe with allowing them to be an independent adult who has the right to sometimes make poor choices? This is a tricky dilemma, one which interweaves with past history, emotional issues, familial roles and generational differences (see below for some great reference material). Here are some warning signs to look out for which may indicate the need for more help. Has your loved one...

Experienced a fall/falls (often if you know of one, more minor ones have occurred that are not mentioned)? Or unexplained injuries?

Decreased activity, withdrawn from social activities, or appears fearful of going out or participating in regular activities or exercise?

Exhibited forgetfulness or memory loss, which they may try to cover for but you notice perhaps they forget to pay a bill or ask a question twice, or perhaps allow a relative to speak for them more often?

Neglected personal hygiene or household duties? This may be subtle, such as someone who was previously meticulous starting to clean less or repeat outfits.

Changed eating habits? Eating less or hoarding items, cooking less or eating more sweets or snacks vs. cooking meals or eating nutritiously?

Missed appointments or left prescriptions unfilled?

Made unusual purchases or decisions that seem uncharacteristic/in bad judgment?

Shown signs of depression and loneliness?

It may be valuable to have an independent evaluation of your loved one if you are not sure about signs you may see. It is hard to see things unemotionally when dealing with a family member, and there is a delicate balance between ensuring safety and allowing a person his/her independence. Our *geriatric care managers* can do an evaluation, and approach it in a way that does not insult the elder's sense of self. The *care manager* can then assist you in options for supporting your loved one's safety while maximizing their independence and quality of life.

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Resources for caregivers:

Delehanty, Hugh & Ginzler, Elinor. *Caring for Your Parents: The Complete AARP Guide*. 2005. 221 p. AARP, \$19.95.

Pipher, Mary. *Another Country: Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Our Elders*. 1999. 328p. Riverhead Books, \$24.95. (1-57322-129-5)

Grote, William. *Helping Your Aging Parent*. 2002. Boomer Books.

Solie, David. *How to Say it to Seniors: Closing the Communication Gap with Our Elders*. 2004. Prentice Hall Press.

www.agingwisely.com includes a variety of updated articles and resources

www.cfad.org "Caring From a Distance"

www.caregiver.org Family Caregiver Alliance (including a very useful tool, "Handbook for Long Distance Caregivers")

www.benefitscheckup.org –website to check what public benefits & financial assistance one might be eligible for-good starting point for exploring available financial assistance

www.eldercare.gov The Eldercare Locator, which provides the contact information for your local Area Agency on Aging or other public aging organization.