

Caring for Elders

Consulting with Parents on Options

By Kevin Bourke

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Kevin, my widowed mother is aging and I'm starting to worry about what kind of care she will need and who will pay for it. What can I do to prepare?

Vicki from Ann Arbor, MI

This is being asked millions of times every day as the American population ages.

Questions abound: Who will care for my parents? Should I care for them myself? They tell me they want to remain in their own home, is that possible? How much will it cost and who will pay for it?



Money Talks

In interviewing experts in senior care, I noticed that communication, interdependence, and the challenge of hiring competent help seem to be the primary concerns.

First, communication. Do you know what your mother's wishes are when it comes to care? What are her values and preferences? How does she want her physical needs addressed?

Suzanne McNeely, Founder of Senior Planning Services, a Santa Barbara-based company, helps adult children understand what their aging parents are thinking. "Seniors, primarily those around age 80 and above, are concerned with their legacy. They are asking themselves what meaning their lives had and how they will be remembered." And this developmental process requires that they feel in control of their lives.

Adult children can more effectively assist their parents if they acknowledge what their parents say. “While seniors may seem stubborn, it is really just a manifestation of their need for control,” Suzanne adds. “If their adult children can listen carefully, they will be in a much better position to negotiate a situation that satisfies everyone’s needs.”

[AARP](#) reports that over 85% of people aged 65 and over want to remain in their homes. So no one should be surprised when their parent, no matter how advanced their age, states their firm desire to remain in their own home. The adult child may feel that this is at best a mistake, and potentially a disaster. But the manner in which they discuss this can make all the difference.

Perhaps the adult child can respond by saying something like: “Let’s figure out what it would take for you to stay home and be safe. We want to avoid medical problems or an accident that might cause you to need to be hospitalized.”

It will likely take multiple conversations before the senior and the adult child reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

Next, let’s address the concept of interdependence. Complete independence means that an older person lives on their own, does their own cleaning, shopping, cooking, and so forth. But it may not be necessary for a senior to be completely alone to have a satisfying measure of independence.

Steve Barlam of LivHome, an at-home senior care company, says that seniors can “depend on someone in one arena, and be independent in other arenas. Interdependence means that some of the normal duties an older person would manage are delegated to others, giving the senior more freedom and time for themselves.”

Being interdependent may allow them to maintain a greater degree of control and freedom as it may reduce the possibility of them having a debilitating accident. Having someone to assist them may ultimately lead to a better quality of life.

In a future issue, Vicki, we’ll discuss the idea of who to hire to assist the senior, how to obtain the senior’s cooperation, and how to pay for help.

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