



## CARING FOR OTHERS

# Honoring Our Parents: Decision Making for Aging Parents

*Understanding your parent's fears, such as a decline in quality of life, while respecting their independence is key for a healthy relationship with aging parents.*

At some point in our adult life, our roles may shift as our parents age and are less capable of caring for themselves. The challenge, even as adults is that we are faced with parenting our parents. How do we get our parents to let us make decisions for them?

As an eldercare professional who is also involved with my own "parent care", my challenge is to integrate 37 years of geriatric care management and expertise while advocating for the best possible end of life care for my parents. Unfortunately, my siblings and I are currently faced with the realization that our parents of 92 and 93 years of age are beginning to decline. How do we continue to respect and honor our parent's wishes to remain at home? How much do we control and how much do our parents control? Many elderly parents are not ready to give up their independence and give control over decisions to their adult children. Understanding your parent's fears, such as a decline in quality of life, while respecting their independence is key for a healthy relationship with aging parents.

Following are some guidelines that may be helpful in getting parents to let you begin to make decisions for them:

- Always include your parent in decision making as much as possible given their unique set of life experiences. This includes safety issues, cognitive functioning, physical conditions, economics and practicality. The more involved aging parents are, the better. Try to understand what is important to them and reassure them you are there for them. Taking control of decision making for your parents doesn't mean they don't have an opinion that should not be considered. Encourage your parents to make decisions and respect that it is their life.
- Approach your parents openly and honestly about your concerns. Offer your help in decision making rather than insisting you take control. It may be easier for your parent to be receptive to your help

in the long run. Share your observations to plant the seed for future conversations. Offer assistance with decisions about finances, healthcare and daily responsibilities. Find ways for your parent to remain independent. If your parent can remain safely at home, try to maintain that as long as possible.

- Decide together what responsibilities and decisions your parent can still control. For example, if eyesight effects their ability to pay bills, offer to assume that responsibility.
- Conversations about decision making cannot happen at once. Several conversations may need to take place over time. Once the conversation has begun, parents often wish they had started it sooner. Be patient and give them time to think about their options. Stress what the benefits are to them and that they will have a choice in the decisions that need to be made.

Honoring our aging parents is about maintaining their personhood. Sometimes honoring can be difficult due to how our parents parented us. Try to understand the situation from their perspective. Getting outside assistance from professionals may be one way to ensure your relationship is protected with your aging parent while honoring their wishes.

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