

## Part I. SIGNS YOUR AGING PARENT OR LOVED ONE MAY NEED HELP

As we age, our physical and mental capabilities may begin to decline. This is a natural function of growing older. However, if your elderly loved one begins to exhibit behaviors or symptoms that are unusual for them or ceases to display typical habits, characteristics or routines, it's time to take notice and take action. Here are some things to look for in determining whether your aging parent(s) needs help:

- **Personal neglect:** Have they slowed or stopped carrying out their everyday hygiene, dressing and grooming?
- **Mobility issues:** Do they appear to have difficulty getting around or lack steadiness? Do they have trouble standing up from a seated position? Are there any bruises or scrapes that may indicate that they've fallen or bumped into furniture?
- **Memory impairment:** Do they exhibit signs of memory loss at a level that is concerning? Do they seem uncertain or confused when performing once-familiar tasks? Are they missing important dates or getting lost in conversations?
- **Poor housekeeping:** How does their home look? Are there piles of laundry lying around or spoiled food in the refrigerator? It's unhealthy to live in a household that's dirty and unsafe to live in a home that is cluttered.
- **Dramatic weight loss:** Have they lost a noticeable amount of weight? Weight loss in the elderly is not uncommon. However, if it's dramatic, it might indicate a serious health issue, depression, a loss of ability to prepare meals, or worry about budgeting for food.
- **Social inactivity:** Are they socially withdrawn? Isolation is terrible for both physical and mental health. As one ages, positive social engagement is especially important. It just becomes more difficult to find.
- **Questionable judgment:** Are they exhibiting poor judgment, such as excessive spending or making uncharacteristic purchases? Are they easily taken in by phone/mail/online scams?
- **Social miscues:** Are they making uncharacteristic comments or responding inappropriately to friends, family or strangers? Do they seem to lack a "filter" in social situations that is unusual for them?
- **Driving incidents:** Are they safe driving? Are there unexplained dents and scratches on the car?
- **Money mishaps:** Do they seem to have difficulty managing money and finances? Are there unpaid bills, late payment notices, bounced checks or calls from bill collectors?
- **Medication missteps:** Are they taking medications properly? Check your parents' prescriptions to make sure they're being taken regularly and at the correct dosages.
- **Chronic health issues:** Are they struggling with frequent problems, such as urinary tract infections (UTI's), dizziness, "seeing things" that aren't there? Hallucinations and light-headedness are common symptoms of nutritional

and/or electrolyte deficiencies, often due to dehydration. UTI's are a common result of dehydration.

If you notice any of these signs on a persistent basis, it may be time to talk with your parent and/or their healthcare advisor. A good benchmark is the presence of any one or more of these indicators at least half of the time you're with your parent. Pay attention to reports of these signs from others who spend time with your parent as well, such as friends or neighbors. If possible, stay in touch with these people for confidential updates, particularly if you're not able to be with your parent often.

Part II of this series, "How to Have Constructive Conversations," will help you find ways to discuss these troubling occurrences with your parents.

## Part II. HOW TO HAVE CONSTRUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Given that your parent or loved one is probably aware that they are "slipping" and that their world is narrowing, discussions about their future are likely to be laden with emotion. *More than anything, you will need to approach these talks with compassion and understanding.* Here are some further suggestions for beginning the conversation:

**Don't delay:** The optimal time to broach the subject is as soon as you notice something's "different" about mom or dad—before things begin to decline even further or a crisis situation arises.

**Have a plan:** Now is not the time to improvise. It's important to consider the things you wish to discuss with your parent in advance. Rehearse or even role play what you will say and how you'll bring up certain topics. Come prepared with key points to raise, and ask yourself in advance what you wish to gain from the conversation. Try to anticipate how your parent will react and how you'll respond to each possible scenario.

**Enlist family members:** Don't go this potentially rough road alone. Join with other family members (your parent's spouse included, if applicable) in formulating a discussion plan ahead of time. It's crucial for everyone to be on the same page and present a united front. It may also be helpful to designate a certain family member as "leader" of conversations, one who can keep the process going and make sure that everyone agrees to and understands it.

**Empower your parent:** While you're rallying your family team, keep in mind that your parent is the most influential member of the conversation. Listen to them attentively and compassionately; ask them questions about their desires, concerns and fears, while also impressing upon them that a comprehensive plan is essential. Assure them that the entire family is part of the decision process, and you're all in this together.

**Be straightforward:** Don't complicate things by hiding negative information or "sugarcoating" realities. Be honest and forthcoming about changes, concerns, limitations and possibilities. Be sure to also offer hope in the foundation of your support and strength as a family unit.

**Offer to accompany your parent on doctor visits:** "Four ears are better than two" is a great rule of thumb for anyone having a medical consultation, particularly an aging loved one. Offer to help your parent schedule doctor or healthcare visits, and commit

to attending them with him or her. This may be assuring to your parent as well as helpful in gathering and grasping important information.

**Take it in stages:** If time allows and you are not in an immediately critical situation, be careful not to overwhelm your parent with too much discussion at once. Respect their wishes to take a break from the topic, while gently stressing that the conversations need to continue. Agree upon an appropriate time and place to meet again before you part ways, and remind your parent ahead of time of your next discussion.

Part III of this series, “Where to Find Reputable Resources,” will help you recognize some traits of a dependable website and provide you with links to trusted local and national organizations.

### **Part III. WHERE TO FIND REPUTABLE RESOURCES**

It’s critical to consult trusted resources in the exploration of help for your senior parent or loved one. In the process, you will likely be spending a lot of time on the Internet. As anyone who’s ever searched the web probably knows, some sites are more reliable than others. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you research:

- Look for an “About Us” or “Who We Are” page that is anchored in solid company history, experience and mission.
- Beware of requests for credit card or financial information.
- Avoid sites that seem pushy or biased, cornering you into one choice only—theirs.
- Don’t be swayed by offers or testimonials that seem “too good to be true.” These tactics can be a sign of exaggeration or, worse, a scam.
- Visit only sites with well-written content and no misspellings or grammatical errors, attractively displayed graphics, working links, and easy, well-organized navigation.
- Look for trust builders, such as testimonials from residents and their families, business accreditations and special awards.
- Follow social media links, such as Facebook and Twitter, to read comments from visitors who have no vested interest in the company or organization.

Here are some reliable local and national organizations you may wish to investigate. These comprehensive websites include several subsidiary resources and relevant phone numbers as well.

#### **Illinois organizations:**

[Alzheimer’s Association Chapters in Illinois](#)

[Area Agencies on Aging](#)

[City of Chicago Senior Services](#)

#### **National organizations:**

[AARP](#)

[Administration for Community Living](#)

[Alzheimer’s Association](#)

[HELPGUIDE Senior Housing](#)  
[Leading Age](#)  
[National Council on Aging](#)

Part IV of this series, “How to Find a Supportive Environment That Satisfies Everyone,” will examine quality of life in two principal situations: remaining in one’s home and moving into a senior living community.

## **Part IV. HOW TO FIND A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT THAT SATISFIES EVERYONE**

Finding a supportive living environment that all parties can agree upon may be difficult, but after key conversations and reputable resources have been explored, arriving at a mutual decision can be ultimately freeing for adult children—and their parents.

### **Aging in Place**

Most older adults would prefer to “age in place,” which means staying in the residence of their choice for as long as possible. If your loved one is healthy, engages in social activities and needs little assistance, remaining in their home may be a safe and reasonable option. However, even without the need for additional services, isolation and depression can set in, causing a myriad of physical and emotional difficulties.

More and more seniors and their children are discovering that a quality senior living community can be the best of all worlds. In addition to onsite assistance and 24/7 security offered by many senior communities, preserving the concept of “aging in place,” the best senior neighborhoods offer all of life’s advantages—physical, emotional, mental, and social.

Indeed, what may be most valuable of all are the intangibles in life: freedom, peace of mind, and endless possibilities. While older adults sometimes fear that a move from their own home will inhibit their independence, they often find that just the opposite is true. Liberation from chores, seclusion, and inactivity paves the way for new opportunities and new connections, every day. Life becomes about what seniors *want* to do, not what they *have* to do. Access to quality healthcare, if needed, replaces anxiety and worry on the part of parents and adult children with a sense of confidence and wellbeing.

### **In-Residence Caregiving Services**

Obtaining services in a private residence can be complicated and even dangerous. Consider these issues:

- How much help is required? Depending on your parent’s needs, a caregiver could be responsible for any number of duties, from assisting with minor tasks to offering skilled therapy. Decisions about type and frequency of care must be carefully and realistically evaluated.
- How much will it cost? Expenses vary widely, depending on the level of assistance needed and the agency or individual employed. It is a misconception that it’s

always more affordable for seniors with care needs to remain at home. Most caregivers operate on an “à la carte” basis, whereby the more help that is needed, the higher the cost. This is especially true of agency-based assistance.

- What quality of life will your parent have in their home? This is perhaps the most important question of all. Older adults who can no longer attend to themselves exclusively are at risk of becoming less active and, thus, more lonely and isolated. Even the most qualified caregiver cannot offer the fulfilling scope of activity and socialization your parent needs and deserves.

Navigating senior living options is often emotional and always time-consuming, but in the long run, you will be glad you invested the time and energy in finding the best resources available to you and your loved ones so they may live their very best life.

*We at The Danish Home sincerely hope this series has been helpful to you in the all-important decision about which living situation is best for your parents or loved ones. Please feel free to contact us at any time for a tour of The Danish Home or to further discuss living options. Collectively, our skilled staff has nearly 150 years of experience in elder care, and some of our staff members have been with us for more than 20 years. At The Danish Home, we care for our residents as if they were our own family. We are truly a home in the very best sense, and we are happy to assist you as you navigate this process in any way we can.*