

A Guide To Discussing the Potential Need for Support With An Aging Loved One



How to have a difficult conversation with an aging loved one.

Introduction

Suggesting to your aging loved one that they may need help is extremely difficult and awkward. It represents a change in your relationship. From once being the one who was cared for, to becoming the care-giver, is a major life event. Imagine how difficult it is for your aging loved one to be faced with the prospect that their family members are worried that they may no longer be able to live independently. It often takes courage to broach this subject (and a little subtlety), but having this conversation is an act of love, as it demonstrates that you want them to remain happy and healthy for as long as possible.



When is the right time to think about having the conversation?

First look for the more obvious signs, (we suggest using the check list on the following page). The family might wish to complete this first, to decide for themselves that it is the right time to have this conversation. Once the family has evaluated the situation for themselves, then complete a second version with the aged loved one present. The aged loved one may have developed some good coping strategies to overcome difficulties, but experience shows that these are often unsustainable. Remember to be gentle and compassionate when broaching this subject as this can be a very tough subject for people who pride themselves on their independence and self reliance.



Weighting	Areas	Details	Score *
General		How many in the last year?	
1		Falls	
1		Vehicle accidents	
1		Medical incidents (other than check ups)	
Long term health			
1		Recent medical condition not getting better / slow	
1		A health condition is getting worse	
Activities of daily living (ADLS)		Score 1 for difficult., 2 for very difficult, 3 for impossible	
1, 2 or 3		Eating	
1, 2 or 3		Toileting	
1, 2 or 3		Selecting proper clothing and dressing	
1, 2 or 3		Grooming	
1, 2 or 3		Maintaining continence	
1, 2 or 3		Bathing	
1, 2 or 3		Walking	
1, 2 or 3		Transferring (e.g. from bed to wheelchair)	

* see next page for how to interpret the results.

Continued on next page:



Instrumental Activities of daily living (ADLS)		Score 1 for each IADLS that is difficult, 2 for impossible	
1 or 2		Managing finances	
1 or 2		Handling transportation (personal or public)	
1 or 2		Shopping	
1 or 2		Preparing meals	
1 or 2		Using the telephone / communications devices	
1 or 2		Managing medications	
1 or 2		Housework and basic home maintenance	
TOTAL SCORE			

Results

Results: Please note that this is indicative only, showing the relative importance of each activity. Any score on this check list, means you should have the conversation, between 1-5, it might be a neighbor or friend could assist, but at least discuss the coping strategies. A score of 5 or higher indicates regularly scheduled long term care is likely required. The higher the number, the larger the amount of care required.



The bigger picture

It is likely the aging loved one has good coping strategies in place for difficult activities, but are these realistic and sustainable? It is possible there is an element of denial about the seriousness of the problem. Here are some other, important ways to deepen the assessment of the aged loved one around their home environment.

The 'hug test'

First give the aging loved one a hug, perhaps telling them that you are thinking of their best interests, but also use the hug to assess the following:

- Unexplained weight loss (or gain)
- Feeling more frail
- Strange body odors
- Changes in appearance, clothes, facial, grooming

Social factors

- Are they engaging with friends, neighbors, or church as before?
- Do they leave the house as often?
- Do they have someone who can assist / check up on them?

Money signs

- Accumulation of unopened mail (both a sign and a tripping hazard)
 - Unopened mail...are bills unpaid?
 - Other packages (buying unneeded items)
- Any new financial relationships? New bookkeeper, insurance agent, financial consultant, lawyers etc.
 - What is the reason for the change?
 - Is there anything the aging loved one doesn't understand?
 - Watch out for fraud!
 - Ask to meet with any new advisors to stay informed. Be wary if the third party is reluctant to meet / discuss with you



General home inspection

Look around the house, especially the kitchen,

The kitchen

- Look for expired, stale / moldy food
- Multiple of the same items. Are they repeatedly buying the same items?
- Only TV dinners to eat (these are generally not healthy)
- Broken appliances or signs of damage / fires

Other areas

- Clutter
- Tripping hazards
- Dirt or lack of cleaning

Pets and plant care

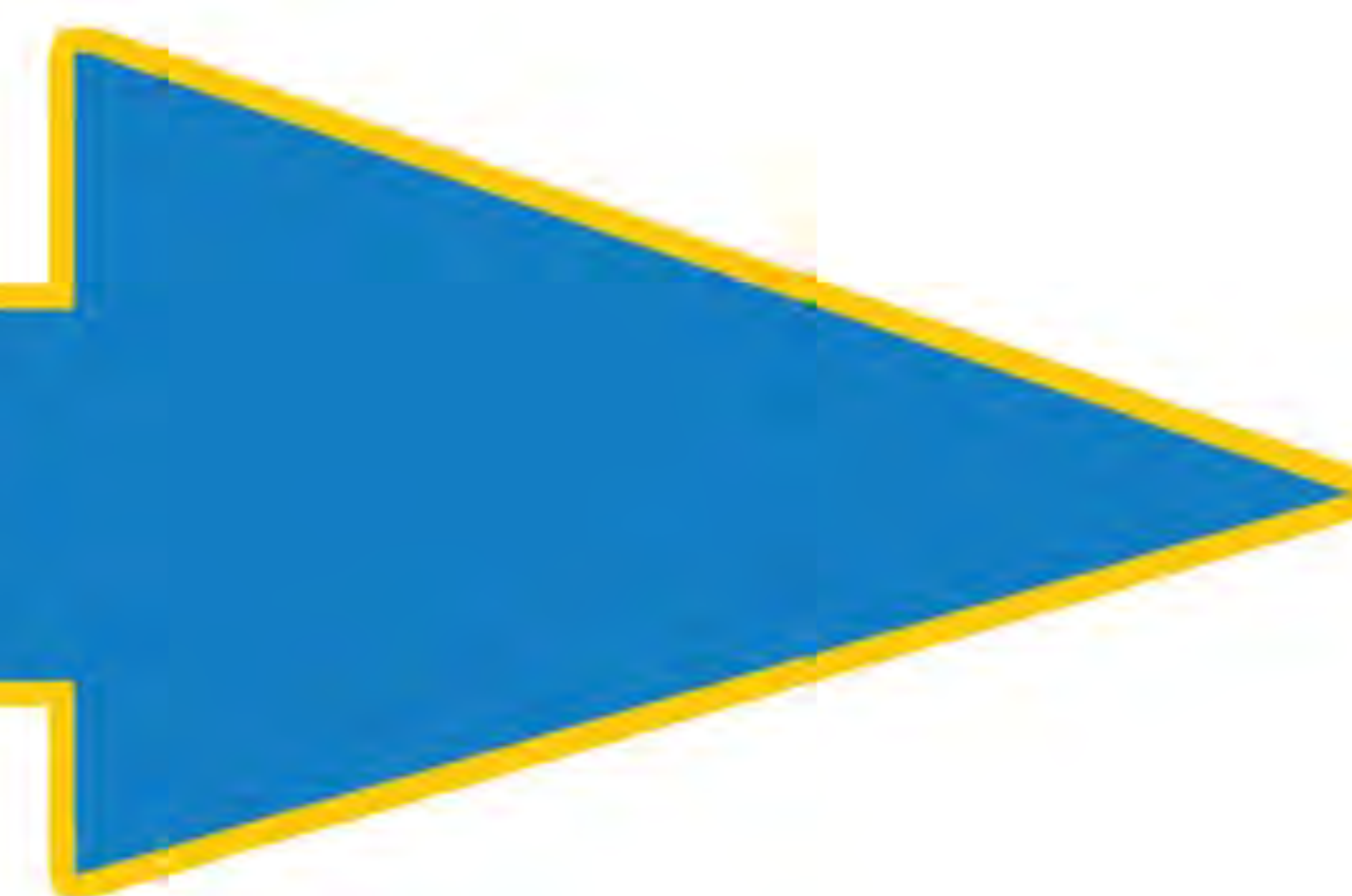
- Are any pets well cared for?
- Look for dead & dying plants

House maintenance

- Is anything broken?
- Leaks
- Dripping faucets
- Running toilets
- Newspapers in bushes / unopened mail



Driving



If the aging loved one is still driving, suggest they drive to a restaurant, library etc. Take the time to look at the following:

- New nicks, dents in car
- Correct seat belt usage
- Tension, distraction, taking a strange route to avoid certain roads / intersections
- Are they driving safely? Too slow?
- Is the vehicle well maintained?

If their driving is not safe, you must encourage them to stop driving. Tell them there are plenty of great options to going car free e.g., ride sharing, Uber specifically trains driver on senior passenger's needs. Point out to them that this removes stress and increases their safety. For the occasional driver, it is cheaper to use ride sharing.

Seek out other opinions:

- Talk to other family members
- Talk to their primary care doctor (you will need a loved one's permission)
- Talk to friends / neighbors.

If you believe the aging love you needs help, you will often meet resistance, so it can help to bring in neutral third party. Plan Life care offer free initial consultations using an Registered Nurse to “proscribe” a protocol of Home Care, if that is needed. Other services such a geriatric care manager may offer similar. If this is approached medically, then home care is more likely to be accepted.





For further information and a free consultation:

Call +1 386 968-1920

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or use the QR code

