



# HEART FIELDS

Assisted Living At Richmond

FIVE STAR SENIOR LIVING™

## Breaking the Ice With Aging Parents Ability to Live Independently

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The holiday season brings families together to celebrate and enjoy holiday festivities. This presents adult children an excellent opportunity to observe their aging parents mental and physical health. Additionally children can discuss any day to day challenges their parents face and assess their ability to continue living independently.

We are raised to honor and respect our parents and certainly want to do so as they get older. However, we may need to overcome the instinct to "let them be, they know what they're doing" in order to proactively ensure that they have the safety, care and quality of life that they deserve. These guidelines will lead you to breaking the ice and having that critical conversation.

**Be Warned:** This may be challenging. Seniors don't always realize they need supervision and/or help with daily activities. Very often older adults do not or will not accept that they may need help. So, before you approach the conversation, educate yourself about what to look for and the care options available.

The Activities of Daily Living (ADL) are just that, the things that we do each day to sustain ourselves, such as making meals, taking medications, getting in and out of bed, using the bathroom, taking a bath or shower, or just keeping up with the house. Being aware of how your parent is handling these activities is one critical way to start assessing an aging parent's independence.

Sometimes, the person needing extra help with an ADL is a relative or someone for whom you have power of attorney. Family members very often are not aware that a need exists until a crisis occurs. A fall or long-term hospitalization leaves the senior frail and unable to take full advantage of assisted living facilities.

Being aware also includes knowing what care options are available. Mom may be able to take care of dad, but is her health diminishing in the process? Or is dad living alone and overwhelmed maintaining the house? Knowing that there are options, such as assisted living, to help address these challenges and improve your parents quality of life are critical to the next steps you will take.



## **Additional Signs to Assess a Parent's Independence:**

Difficulty performing daily activities:

- Wearing same clothes multiple days
- Bathing less frequently or a lack of personal hygiene
- Skipping meals or using snacks as meals
- Laundry and housekeeping becoming a burden
- Spends time in only a few rooms in the house

Memory loss:

- Repeating questions or statements, multiple phone calls with the same questions
- Leaving the stove on, frequently misplacing items

Medication concerns:

- Forgetting to take medications or confusion over dosages
- Running out of medications or not properly ordering medications
- Keeping expired medications

Lack of Socialization:

- Losing touch with friends and isolating themselves
- Loss of interest in activities, hobbies and holidays
- Showing signs of depression, sleeping more or crying a lot
- Loss of spouse, relatives and long-time friends.

Safety concerns:

- Stairs and steps make it more likely to fall
- No help nearby if fall or emergency occurs
- Difficulty getting in and out of tub or on and off of the toilet
- Increase in clutter around house causing risks of falling
- Poorly maintained or aging heating, cooling, security or electrical systems.

## **Exploring Care Options, Such as an Assisted Living Facility:**

When families of aging parents determine their parents are having trouble taking care of themselves or their house, it may be time to consider assisted living. Most aging people want to hold on to their independence for as long as possible, although that is not always what is best for them.

An assisted living facility permits seniors to enjoy the highest degree of independence possible, while receiving assistance. Residents benefit from three healthy meals a day, housekeeping, planned daily activities, medication supervision and transportation to doctor's appointments. More importantly, residents enjoy companionship of other seniors. This is especially valuable for parents who recently lost a spouse.

## How to have the conversation:

- The best time to have this conversation is before it is needed. It is important to discuss seeking help with activities of daily living early to avoid hasty or rushed decisions. Ask probing or open ended questions to assess how parents are handling daily activities. For example, "How are you doing in keeping up the house?" "What activities are you no longer able to do?" "What activities are simply too expensive to continue?" "What is your plan to handle an emergency, such as a power outage, fall or accident?"
- Although there may be one person, typically the daughter, who takes the lead in providing care to aging parents, it is critical to include all members of the core family in any care discussions/decisions. It is important that the family agree that their parents need extra assistance and plan how to move forward. If there is a member of the family who is most influential with your parents, have them prepared to help engage in or facilitate the conversation.
- Choose a quiet time when everyone is in a good mood such as during a meal, on the way home from church or taking a walk. The holidays are ideal.
- It is perfectly natural for your parents to feel scared, threatened or embarrassed, so it is essential that everyone is patient and companionate. If the conversation gets uncomfortable or at all confrontational, agree to revisit the subject at a later time.
- Ask if they have discussed or considered moving to simplify their life and discuss the benefits of an assisted living lifestyle.

Whether the conversation is formal or informal, such as your weekly phone conversation with mom, start to be more observant of any challenges that your aging parents may be encountering. With every conversation you are collecting the information to build your relationship with your parent and ensuring that you are prepared to help provide guidance and direction should your parents need it.

Having this conversation can make a difference in restoring the quality of life for seniors and ease worries for their children. Next month we will discuss how to choose an assisted living facility.

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