

# CHAMPS

Center for Healthy Aging Ministries, Programs & Services



## How Do You View Your Parent(s)?

Aging is deceptive! We often see ourselves and others through 'rose colored glasses'. We often think of others as getting old and fail to recognize the person we see in the mirror each day as having declined at all. In other words we have a "mirrored" view that reflects our "mental" image. One elder was overheard to say, "Boy, Paul Newman is sure looking old these days." In truth the person making the statement is five years older than Paul Newman. This tendency to see ourselves as young and vibrant seems to be insulation against the reality of our aging.

However, it is not just the elders who see themselves as they aren't. Adult children often think of their 'folks' as vibrant, independent self-sufficient individuals who 'rule the roost'. The elders may be unrealistic about their needs or don't want

to interfere with the lives of their children so a dance of words may go on for months or even years. This situation can be compounded by adult children and their parents living a distance apart, sometimes a thousand or more miles away. For this reason the adult children are oblivious to the actual slow decline their parents are experiencing and therefore fail to intervene in ways that could improve the lives of their parents. (Persons living a distance away could try having a long time neighbor keep them posted on how their parents are doing.)

Having identified needs does not necessarily mean moving out of the home, although that may be a realistic choice in some circumstances. Before making any decisions you need to get the facts.

When you drive up to visit your parents, look around.

- Is the yard neat and well kept or has it started to decline?
- Who is mowing it and raking the leaves?
- Who takes the trash receptacles to the curb weekly?
- Is the yard now more than Mom or Dad can manage?

If you answered yes to these questions, making arrangements for these services may allow your parents to stay in their home and not have a sudden fall that could result in a fractured hip.

- Inside the home, is there a lot of "clutter" (fire hazard) that needs to be cleared away?
- Is there a clear path of access to the exits from the home?
- Is this a safe environment?
- Has the home fallen into a state of disarray and needs repairs?

If yes, what sources of income are there to do the repairs or modifications that would allow them to remain in their home awhile longer?

Next review their ability to provide **safe self care**.

Look at the whole picture. Remember that “needs” and “wants” are two different things. Granted, they are not mutually separable, but being sure someone is safe is a must!

- Mobility: Are they able to move about independently or do they use assistive devices such as a cane, walker or wheelchair? (If they may fall, do they have a home monitoring system for falls?) Can they move independently from bed, chair or toilet; or do they require assistance?
- Nutrition: Do they prepare their own meals independently and are they able to shop for their own groceries? Do they have to have someone help open canned goods or do the meal preparation? Are they actually eating the food in the house or is there lots of “spoiled” or uneaten food in the refrigerator? Are they losing weight?
- Hygiene: Are they able to provide for their own bathing and dressing needs independently? Check them for bruises and indications that they are falling. Are they in clean clothing or frequently in the same outfit over and over?
- Housekeeping: Can they do all the housework independently or would having someone clean once a week and do the laundry and vacuuming be needed?
- Health Issues: Do they have debilitating conditions that require the assistance of a professional care giver or in-home care giver aide? Are they able to take their medications as prescribed? Do they need someone to set up their weekly medications for them? Do they need a medication dispensing system?
- Mental Status: Are they alert and oriented to date, time and place? Can they use reasonable good judgment or are they confused? Can they operate the telephone to call help? Are their reflexes safe to be driving and/or operating power equipment?

After you assemble” the facts” make a list of needs and possible solutions. For instance, would maintaining the yard, buying the weekly groceries and doing minor errands allow your folks to remain independent longer?

Would part-time paid assistance of a housekeeper or home care giver be of value?

It is not easy to give up your independence! It is critical for both the

parents and the adult children to talk about the parents needs, the resources available and to do creative problem solving. What can the parents stay in control of and what do they need help with? It is vitally important to maintain the parents’ dignity, family legacy and some degree of control over their own lives. There is no substitute for loving care and the nurturing of family, friends and God.

*Even to your old age and gray hairs  
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.  
I have made you and I will carry you;  
I will sustain you and I will rescue you. (Isaiah 46:4)*

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