How Can I Deal with My Aging Parent?

Dealing with parents and your relationships with them can become a major challenge as they get older. You observe your aging parents facing their own mortality. You see they are without any objectives in life, having fewer friends with whom to share things, and feeling increased isolation. Add to this other life issues they have to adjust to:

- Loss of freedom and mobility, and doing things for themselves
- Loss of good health
- Loss of decision-making about their affairs
- Loss of self worth and dignity
- Loss of spouse and friends

During this time, you have your own conflicting emotions. There is a tendency to feel resentment due to the amount of your time they are consuming, guilt for feeling this way, and the fear of caring for an incapacitated parent and their eventual death.

What Decisions Should I Be Making For My Aging Parent?

You may find yourself in the difficult situation of role reversal: The child now becomes the parent. Both parent and child may reject this role reversal initially, but when the common goal is viewed as the ultimate welfare of the parent, both parent and child learn to accept their new roles, and the child can become the advisor, and not the boss.

When you have to make immediate decisions on parental care, research the alternatives, and give your parent choices. Let your parent be part of the process, and give your parent time to adjust to the idea. But when the time comes to take charge and make decisions for your parent, do not be afraid to go ahead and do what is necessary for their well-being.

Do Not Forget to Plan for the Future

Build a strong relationship with your parents that consist of open communication and mutual trust, and work with your parents to plan for the future. Ensure that they have the following in place:

- A will
- Insurance - health and life
- Financial and legal counsel
- Power of attorney
- Living wills
- Preferences in living arrangements
- Recreational and social needs
- Preferences for funeral arrangements/organ donation
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- Recreation and social needs
- Preferences for funeral arrangements/organ donation

Listed below are some simple rules that can guide you in dealing with aging parents. They are:

- Be Aware: Look for signs of deteriorating health or abilities.
- Be Understanding: Do not forget that your parents are dealing with a lot of feelings as they face the death of a spouse, friends, or their own eventual death.
- Be Patient: Give them time to vent their feelings.
- Be Firm: Be there for your parents but do not feel guilty if you have to attend to your needs or your family’s needs.
- Be Caring: Show them they are worth loving and that they have people to care for them.