

Aging Happens: How are your loved ones doing?

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If you're visiting friends or family this holiday season, you might notice that some things have changed. No surprise there, but when these changes have implications about a person's well-being, it's a good idea to take note.

Whether it's their personal appearance or that of their surroundings, it may be necessary to find appropriate interventions. I'm not someone who recommends a thorough review of tough topics during a holiday visit. No one wants their dinner conversation to center around their family's belief that they're not as functional as they once were. It would be great if these types of conversations were just a natural part of an aging adult's life, but this is often not the case. So, what should you look for and who should you contact if you have some real concerns?

Here's a sample list of personal changes and behaviors to be aware of: poor personal hygiene; inappropriate clothing for the weather; obvious weight loss or gain; change in ability to walk; bruising on the body; not attending former social activities; more confusion or repetitions; or unusual moods.

As well, you might see changes to their environment, such as: areas of their home needing serious repair; lack of normal maintenance, such as lightbulbs; outdated food in fridge, or lack of food; even bumps or scratches on the car. Their well-loved pets might also be looking less than ideal.

This is when it's usually recommended that you have a conversation about what you're seeing or observing. I'm suggesting that if you do, then please keep it short. Take it slowly, and be careful not to rush to judgment, as it's possible that some of these changes might have other reasonable explanations. Keep in mind, this is not a "one and done" type of conversation. Ideally, the person you're concerned about will welcome your input, but many times, it doesn't work this way. Please consider that these important conversations take consideration and evolve over time.

You might not know where to turn for help in addressing any of these problems, either now or later. There are so many options here in Jackson County, based on how challenging this situation really is. A call to our local Area Agency on Aging, known here as Senior and Disability Services of the Rogue Valley Council of Governments (<http://rvcog.org>; 541-664-6674), will provide you with a myriad of services and suggestions. The local Alzheimer's Association in Medford (https://www.alz.org/oregon/in_my_community_64240.asp; 541-772-2230) is also a good resource. I've mentioned the Aging Life Care Association (<http://www.aginglifecare.org>; 520-881-8008) many times, and as one of several local members, I endorse their services.

Don't overlook our local bookstore, Bloomsbury Books (541-488-0029). They have several books there by local authors on this topic. Here's a sample list: "When You Get Older, Where Will You Live?" by Ellen Rubenson; "Living with Dying: A Complete Guide for Caregivers," by Jahna Beecham and Katie Ortlip; and "Aging Happens," by yours truly. They should all be in the Ashland library as well.

AARP has a wonderful checklist where you can do your own assessment of a questionable situation (https://www.aarp.org/relationships/caregiving-resource-center/info-08-2010/ga_assessment_checklist.html). Remember that a professional might still be a good idea, once you get through the initial checklist on your own. Refer to the suggestions above for further support.

Besides all this serious business, it's important to keep the spirit of enjoyment alive during the visit. Here in Ashland, we have so many activities you can include in your plans. You will want to take care not to overdo it, though. If you're noticing any of these changes mentioned above, (or even if you're not), consider that less is best for many older people. Check out this link for holiday activities they might enjoy: www.mailtribune.com/special/20171117/holiday-events-in-rogue-valley.

Back to the next steps regarding your concerns. You could let your person know that you would like to continue (or just begin) this conversation in the near future. These problems did not happen overnight, and will need some time to fully address. With respect, patience, and care on your part, the right plan can be more easily developed and accepted. Here's to a happy holiday time for all!