

How to make it easier on those who care about you

*By Ellen Waldman
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Kindness and courtesy. Generosity of spirit. Accommodating. Amiable. Approachable. Compassionate. Considerate.

These words are synonyms for gracious. And aging graciously is the topic of a talk I recently presented at Rogue Valley Manor.

Most people already assume they hold these traits as important and live from this orientation. If you mean your actions, words and choices in life make aging easier for yourself and those who care about you, then this is wonderful. But too often, people make their decisions based solely on what they want, not how it might actually impact themselves or others around them.

It's this ideal of "fiercely independent" or "heroic individualism" taken too far. This is the one issue that, without a doubt, has caused the most problems for families.

If you recall reading a column on this topic earlier this year, you're right. This time, I want to offer ideas that might work when you visit family this season. If you notice any of these signs, you will want to come up with a way to have a conversation that doesn't cause strife in the family. It's not always simple, or we would not even need to consider how to do this.

Here are four key areas to examine during holiday visits. These were suggested by the Aging Life Care Association.

- **Environment:** Is there damage or disrepair around the house; are there piles of unopened mail; does the car have dents or scratches?
- **Food:** Is there adequate food; do you notice weight loss or extreme weight gain?
- **Mood or behavior:** Do you notice increased confusion; have they given up hobbies or social outings; do you notice increased irritability or apathy?
- **Personal hygiene:** Do they not dress like they used to; do clothes seem unkempt or dirty; have they lost interest in personal grooming?

If you've noted any of these or other areas of concern, how do you start a conversation with your loved one? It may mean they need to consider outside help or even living in a different environment.

It's best to have this conversation without confronting them. Asking questions about how their life could be easier or more enjoyable is a good starting point. Offer suggestions about services to help with challenging tasks or to consider an assistant for support.

It's likely that more than one conversation will be necessary. Talking about this in a low-key, non-pressuring manner is important. This allows you to revisit the subject at another time.

Still, in many cases, there will be utter refusal to even consider making these changes, as well as denial of any actually being necessary. For families whose loved one refuses this discussion, it gets quite challenging. Do they have to allow their family or friend to remain at risk and to continue to decline?

Many times, the answer is yes, what else can they do? There is only so much that can be accomplished if the person has no interest in making any appropriate changes. What's left for families is to express their care and their availability to assist. And in too many cases, to pick up the pieces when a crisis occurs.

Aging graciously means you do your best to make it easier for yourself and those who care about you. Being open to change means accepting life on its terms, including allowing help from others.

Choosing to live life guided by the words at the top of this column is a good way to stay oriented.