
Across the Generations
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March 2008

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Note from Lynne

Happy Spring to You!

I was in Arizona for a few days this month visiting my parents. I expected to see a lot of senior citizens, however I was struck by the number of them in poor physical health.

We went to several spring training games (baseball) and I noticed elderly husbands, or wives, helping frail spouses up and down stairs or down the street, etc. I worried about one or both of them falling.

At a restaurant I noticed an elderly man "wobble" in for dinner. He'd probably driven there since Phoenix doesn't lend itself to pedestrian traffic. It was difficult for him to get to his table and I thought about him driving and getting to and from his car where at any point he could fall. I wondered whether this was his only meal of the day, not for economic reasons but because when seniors become less steady on their feet they usually limit how much they're up moving around. They eat more TV dinners and snack foods simply because it's easy, or skip meals completely. I admit I'm more likely to notice these things given my specialty. Adult children don't always notice a physical decline in their parents right away. When parents live in another city or state, visits are often busy and the focus is on catching up. Older adults can often put on a good front for short periods of time so their decline isn't noticeable. Too often a crisis occurs that brings the parent's decline front and center.

There are several things adult children can do to minimize a crisis situation with their aging parents. First you can discuss the "what ifs" with your parents. Second, you might get to know your parents' neighbors since they probably see your parents going about their daily activities and might alert you to changes. Third, when visiting, look around to see how they are keeping up their house, what they have for food in the cupboard. Fourth, learn what their daily/weekly/monthly routine is and ask about it when you talk with them to see if it's changed, less outings, fewer activities, etc.

Preparing for inevitable health and physical changes as your parents age can help reduce the likelihood of a crisis. Such preparation helps keep your parents living independently for as long as possible.

Warmly,

Lynne

Article: **TO BE OR NOT TO BE: YOUR PARENTS' CAREGIVER**

A June 2007 USA Today/ABC News/Gallup Poll found that forty-one percent of U.S. baby boomers who have living mothers or fathers are helping to care for them. Most of those polled, who are caregivers, said they felt it was a minor sacrifice or no sacrifice at all. However, 37% of the people surveyed, who aren't currently caregivers but had aging parents, said that they expect to be caregivers for their parents in the future; about 50% were worried about being able to provide care. (To read the full article: http://www.upi.com/NewsTrack/Science/2007/06/25/baby_boomers_are_caring_for_aging_parents/5254/)

If you're suited to the role of caregiver and filling that role gives you satisfaction, you'll probably find that caring for your aging parents can be a rewarding experience and may bring families closer together.

The USA Today article doesn't say what the 50% of adults worry about with regard to becoming a caregiver. I suspect some of them aren't sure this is a job they want to take on. Care giving is not for everyone. However, many adult children with aging parents believe they should take care of their aging parents; that it's their duty.

If you aren't cut out for the role of caregiver, I'd encourage you not take it on. Why? Because it's unlikely you'll be good at it and you, and your parents, will suffer. There is a high emotional price to pay when you do something you don't want to do and that you don't enjoy. Your parents also pay a price. They may not get adequate care simply because you don't have it in you. There is also the stress on both of you and possible damage to your relationship.

You and your parents are better off hiring someone to provide the care they need. Another option for your parents is moving to a facility that can provide more help as they need it, assuming they can afford this.

Sitting down with your parents and telling them you aren't cut out to be their caregiver will likely be a tough discussion. I've worked with clients who came to realize they weren't the best person to take on the role of caregiver for their parents and felt a lot of guilt and shame about

this. Once we addressed those feelings and they were able to let go of them or, recognize them when they came up and deal with them, they were able to talk with their parents.

In helping clients prepare for difficult conversations, I encourage them to be open and honest about how they feel. It's also important for them to speak in terms of how it affects them.

Once all the cards are on the table, families can put together a plan that meets the needs of their aging parents, reduces the stress of the adult child (or children), and maintains, or even improves the parent-child relationship.

Being the care provider for an elderly parent is an act of love. Recognizing that care giving isn't for you and helping find someone who can provide that care is also an act of love.

Calendar

April 14th, 28th, and May 12th, 2008

SUPPORT GROUP FOR ADULTS WITH AGING PARENTS

Every other Monday from 6:30-8pm at 1020 SW Taylor, #265. (Sign in to the building in the lobby and ask for directions to the 2nd floor conference room.)

Please RSVP: 503-243-2283 or email me: lynne@lynnecoconcounseling.com.

May 17th, 2008

PLANNING FOR FUTURE CARE NEEDS OF AGING PARENTS

From 1-4pm, at 1235 SE Division St, Suite 202B, Portland, Oregon 97202.

Many adults with aging parents struggle with how to talk to their parents about concerns they have for them. An Aging Plan is a tool that provides the structure and questions with which to talk with your parents about important and sensitive issues related to aging. It includes: financial, health, legal and safety elements—beyond the usual paperwork.

This workshop will give you the tools to help you succeed in talking to your parents about the sometimes delicate topic of aging. (This workshop is also appropriate for older adults wanting to make an Aging Plan for themselves with their their adult children.)

For more information, or to register,
<http://www.lynnecoconcounseling.com/workshopscaringf.html>

A recent workshop attendee said, "Your workshop gave me the permission I needed to talk to my mom about taboo issues."

-- Steve Mikalson

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