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# Does an Older Adult in Your Life Need Help?

It is not always clear whether an aging parent or relative needs help. Sometimes a person will recognize that they need help and request it, or an emergency or sudden illness will make it clear. Others may not want to cause worry or admit they're struggling.

If you become aware of the signs that a loved one needs help, you will be better prepared to provide support for their safety and well-being.

## How to tell if someone needs extra support

The best way to know what someone needs is to ask them directly. But a phone call, email, or text message is not always the best way to tell whether an older person needs help. These signs may indicate that someone needs extra support:



**Changes at home.** When you spend time at the person's home, you might notice possible trouble spots. Some examples include:

- Can the person prepare meals on a stove safely?
- Are they bathing regularly and wearing appropriate clothing for the weather?
- Is the home relatively clean and free of clutter?
- Do they have the medications they need, and are they taking them regularly?

**Mental health concerns.** Changes in a person's mood could indicate a need for help. Sometimes depression in older people is confused with normal aging. An older person with [depression](#) might brighten up for a phone call or short visit, but it's harder to hide serious mood problems during an extended visit. Seek immediate help if the person says they feel hopeless or have no reason to live, or if you're worried they may harm themselves. Call or text the 24-hour [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) at **988** or call **800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)**. For TTY, use your preferred **relay service** or dial **711** then **988**.

**Other health concerns.** Signs related to the person's general health that can raise concerns include:

- Significant weight gain or weight loss
- Poor hygiene
- Confusion
- [Falls](#)

- [Loneliness or social isolation](#)
- Trouble walking or getting around

**Memory issues.** Occasional [forgetfulness](#) is a normal part of aging. But more significant [memory problems](#), changes in thinking ability or personality, or poor decision-making could indicate a serious condition that requires medical attention.

## Recognizing changes if you live far away

If you don't live close to an older family member or see them often, it may be difficult to notice if the person needs help.

With the person's permission, you could contact people who see them regularly — neighbors, friends, doctors, or local relatives, for example — and ask them to call you with any concerns. You might also ask if you can check in periodically.

Read more about [long-distance caregiving](#).

## What to do when a loved one needs help

When you notice signs that your aging parent or relative needs help, it is important to know what steps to take next. Some issues have a simple fix, like needing a new glasses prescription. But other times, you may need to provide more support.

Your first step may be to talk to the older person about your concerns. Mention your worry without sounding critical, such as, "Mom, it looks like you don't have much food in the house. Are you having trouble getting to the store?"

Then try to fulfill the person's wishes to the extent possible. For example, if they want to keep cooking at home, you could ask, "Would you like me to arrange to have groceries delivered on a regular basis?" Try to include practical help with your suggestions and give specific examples of what can be done.

If you're concerned about the person's physical or mental health, suggest a visit to a health care provider. You might offer to make the appointment, give them a ride, or [go with them to see the doctor](#).

You don't have to do everything yourself. In many communities, a [variety of services](#) are available to help older people. Depending on the person's needs, you might hire a home health aide to visit on a regular basis, arrange transportation so the person can run errands, or speak with a [geriatric care manager](#) to help coordinate care. You can also find [ways to share caregiving responsibilities](#) with other family members, neighbors, or friends.

## Helping an aging parent or other relative plan for the future

The best time to plan is before the older person needs extensive help. Planning for the possibility of [long-term care](#) gives you and your family time to learn about services available in your community and what they cost. It also allows the older person to make important decisions while they are still able.

There may be a time when your older relative can no longer [live independently at home](#). Learn as much as you can about housing options, which may include moving to a [residential facility](#) (such as a nursing home or assisted living) or living with a family member. These choices may depend on the person's health, ability to perform activities of daily living, financial resources, and personal preferences. Talk about the pros and cons of each option before making a decision.

You may also need to help the older person prepare for decisions about their future medical care — a process called [advance care planning](#). It's important to know what they would want if they became seriously ill or unable to communicate their wishes. Having conversations about the person's preferences and making a plan makes it more likely that they will get the care they want.

## The Caregiver's Handbook

Explore this guide to getting started with caregiving, finding support, and taking care of yourself.

Download or order for free



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- Reading [frequently asked questions about caregiving](#)
- Finding [services for older adults living at home](#)
- Learning more about [long-term care](#)

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## For more information on how to help an aging parent or relative

### Eldercare Locator

800-677-1116

[eldercarelocator@USAgings.org](mailto:eldercarelocator@USAgings.org)

<https://eldercare.acl.gov>

### LongTermCare.gov

202-619-0724

[aclinfo@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:aclinfo@acl.hhs.gov)

<https://acl.gov/ltc>

### Caregiver Action Network

202-454-3970

[info@caregiveraction.org](mailto:info@caregiveraction.org)

[www.caregiveraction.org](http://www.caregiveraction.org)

### Family Caregiver Alliance

800-445-8106

[info@caregiver.org](mailto:info@caregiver.org)

[www.caregiver.org](http://www.caregiver.org)

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