

Activity – Using Your Powers of Observation

During your next visit, use your powers of observation to note changes in the following areas. You may want to make mental notes and then jot down some of your observations privately. We have included some general questions to get you started. In the boxes below, add some of your own specific questions that you may want to assess during your visit.

Approaching the House

- Check the house overall. Any signs of needed maintenance or repair?
- Is the yard neat and shrubs trimmed? Are leaves raked?
- Do they have arrangements for snow shoveling if needed?
- Any noticeable changes in the house or yard since your last visit?

Additional questions regarding the house:

Greeting Your Parents

- How do they appear? Any changes to their general appearance in unexpected ways?
- Any noticeable changes to their mobility? Are they steady in walking or climbing stairs?
- Do they have difficulty getting up from a chair? Is this different from your past visit?
- Are they using glasses or hearing aides when they need to? Do they seem to have difficulty reading or hearing?

Additional questions regarding your parents:

Inside the House

- Note the appearance of rooms, carpets, and furniture. Are there things that have changed beyond the general “wear and tear”? Are there changes in terms of general cleanliness?
- Are there safety hazards on the floor?
- Are stairs free from clutter?
- Are there stacks of newspapers and magazines that keep piling up (beyond what may be “normal” in terms of your family)?

Additional questions regarding inside the house:

In the Kitchen

- Observe how your parents move about the kitchen. Are there potential hazards for them as they get around?
- Are things within easy reach for them?
- Do they have trouble reading labels?
- Try to check out inside the refrigerator (alone if possible!). Is it stocked with healthy items? Does anything have signs of mold? Check dates of salad dressings and other fresh items.
- Do they have difficulty opening jars or cans?

Additional questions regarding the kitchen:

In the Bathroom

- Are there mats to prevent slipping in the bathtub?
- Are there railings or handles in the tub and are they secure?
- Are there expired medications in the medication cabinet? (You might feel like you are prying on this one, but again, you are concerned for their safety.)

Additional questions regarding the bathroom:

CARE Coaching Hint: An area that many older parents welcome help is with technology. They may have gotten a new HD television, but don't know how to program their favorite shows. They may now have a cell phone, but don't know how to program numbers or retrieve messages. Offering to help with their technology needs will often open the door for them to accept your help in other areas.