



PART 5: ASSESSING WELL-BEING

You may already have an inkling that mom or dad is having trouble with daily activities, but seeing changes in family members after months, or even years, can be surprising. A Place for Mom expert and geriatric psychologist Dr. Melissa Henston provides some guidance on how to spot problems and have constructive conversations.

1. NOTICE WHEN SOMETHING IS ‘OFF’

Don't ignore signs that something in your parents' lives are changing. Here are some visual cues to look for when visiting aging loved ones:

- House and yard need care
- Broken appliances
- Cluttered or disorganized house
- Spoiled or expired groceries
- Poor personal hygiene
- Disheveled clothing
- Depressed or low energy temperament

2. APPROACH THE ‘TOUGH CONVERSATION’ WITH CARE

Tread delicately when discussing retirement or end-of-life care. Henston says, *“Don't try to take control. Try to get a natural conversation going.”*

- Sit in a comfortable location, such as over coffee
- Use a normal, conversational tone
- Start with open-ended questions, such as: “How is it around the house?” or “How is driving going?” or “What have you and Dad been doing for fun lately?”

3. AVOID GUILTY FEELINGS

Henston relays that guilt is one of the biggest problems for family members. It's important to consider the full impact of caregiving, however, to keep things in perspective. Ask yourself these questions:

- Can I take time off from work?
- Can I afford to stop work for an extended period of time?
- Can my children and older relative co-exist in harmony?
- Will my children be able to tolerate not always coming first?
- How will this impact my relationship?
- How will this impact my relationship with my older relative?
- How will my siblings and I manage this as a team?
- How will any of this be paid for?

4. BE HONEST

Elderly loved ones usually appreciate an honest conversation. Dr. Henston offers these considerations:

- Include them in the decision-making.
- Explain the logistics of having them stay at home vs the benefits of assisted living.
- Dispel fears about assisted living by requesting they tour a community with you.

5. CONSIDER THE RISKS

Above all else, approach this conversation as a gift. You are concerned about their well-being and welfare.

Here are some risks to consider for seniors living alone:

- Elder Fraud
- Isolation
- Physical Constraints
- Mental Constraints