

7 STEPS TO TAKE WHEN AGING PARENTS NEED HELP

What to do when aging parents need help

If your aging parents need help to stay safe and healthy, you might be unsure about how to handle the situation.

Figuring out their needs, understanding the options, and making decisions can feel overwhelming.

Focusing on something concrete helps you feel more in control of the situation.

Use these 7 steps to turn the vague problem of “my aging parents need help” into a practical, realistic plan to help mom or dad be as healthy and happy as possible.

1. Assess your parent’s needs

Caring for a parent can feel overwhelming because you’re not sure exactly what needs to be done.

To solve that problem, take a step back to understand how much help your parent needs with everyday life.

Think about 8 key areas:

- Family support
- Home safety
- Medical needs
- Cognitive health
- Mobility
- Personal hygiene
- Meal preparation
- Social interaction

How much support are they already getting in each category and how much help do they realistically need to stay safe and healthy?

Write everything down in a **caregiving notebook** so you can keep track of their needs and figure out what services are needed.

For example, let’s say your dad is managing diabetes and heart disease, has no other family nearby, is fairly isolated in a rural area, and hates to cook for himself.

Plus, you live across the country so he’ll need help with medication management, **transportation**, and meals.

To provide the support he needs, you might hire a driver for doctor’s appointments and errands, set up grocery or meal deliveries, and **hire an in-home caregiver** to prepare meals and make sure he’s taking his medicine.

2. Think about your own needs and abilities

Everyone is in a different place in their lives.

Before you make the assumption that you can take care of all your parent’s needs by yourself, stop and think about your own situation and abilities.

- Does your health allow you to physically care for someone?
- Do you live close enough to visit as often as needed?
- Would you want to live with them, either in their house or yours?

- Do you have the kind of relationship that allows you to spend a lot of time together without creating a lot of negative feelings on either side?
- Do you have the personality to provide the type of care they need?
- Are you willing to learn how to provide that care?

We want our parents to be safe and healthy. And it's not selfish or heartless if **you're not the best person to personally provide that care.**

By looking out for their health and safety and arranging the help they'll need, you're still being a supportive and caring child.

It's best to make an honest assessment early in the process so you don't get yourself into a situation that's not sustainable.

If you take on too much and **burn out** physically or emotionally, you won't be able to help your parent or yourself.

3. Include your parent in the process

Nobody wants to lose control of their life, especially someone who's already concerned about losing independence.

That's why it's so important to involve your parent as much as possible when you're planning for their care.

This helps them see you more as a partner rather than someone who's swooping in to make changes.

They're likely to be resistant in the beginning, so it will probably take **multiple conversations.**

As long as they're not in immediate danger, try not to force changes too quickly. You might want to start with less intrusive approaches and increase the level of help as you go.

Unless it's an emergency situation, get them used to accepting help by focusing on 1 or 2 critical needs.

After that, slowly add on until they're getting all the help they truly need.

4. Understand the financial situation

No matter what, caring for an older adult will cost money. It's a good strategy to estimate future costs so you'll be prepared.

Think about the medical care they're likely to need, the cost of their potential living situation (like assisted living vs moving in with you), and everyday costs like food, caregiving supplies, home safety modifications, etc.

Once you have an idea of their financial position, you'll know if they'll be able to afford the care they need or if they'll need **financial help.**

Government programs, Medicaid, and other programs are available to help pay for long term care.

You may want to consult an **elder law attorney** or financial planner to help you with things like qualifying for Medicaid.

Regardless, it's best to plan ahead so they won't get caught in a money crunch.

5. Take care of home safety basics

Safety hazards in the house add up over time, making it easier for older adults to trip, fall, or hurt themselves.

Preventing falls will go a long way to keeping your parent independent for as long as possible.

Simple fixes include:

- Making sure all floors and walkways are **clear of clutter**, cords, and rugs
- Adding **grab bars in the bathroom** and stair railings throughout
- **Updating lights** so all rooms are bright and switches are easily accessible
- Ensuring all appliances work well and are within easy reach
- Minimizing the need to use step-stools or bend down low

For more suggestions, check out this handy **room-by-room home safety modification guide**.

6. Make sure communication is simple and accessible

Another thing that keeps your parent safe is the ability to easily call for help and keep in touch with family and friends.

On top of being a safety hazard, **isolation and loneliness** have a serious negative effect on overall health.

Make sure their phone is easy to use and easily accessible. For some, keeping a simple mobile phone with pre-programmed numbers in their pocket is reassuring and easier to get to.

Or, if your parent is open to the idea, consider a **wearable medical alert device**.

7. Explore available aging care options

Even after breaking down the steps, caring for your parent can be an overwhelming responsibility.

Fortunately, there are many aging care options and helpful resources you can rely on.

- **Geriatric care managers** – they can act as **consultants to guide you** or they can manage all aspects of caring for your parent. Their experience could save you time, money, and headaches down the road.
- **In-home caregiving help** – whether you hire privately or go through a home care agency, hired caregivers take care of seniors in their home.
- **Assisted living communities** – if your parent isn't able to live on their own or needs 24/7 care, assisted living and other **senior housing options** might be the right choice.
- **Geriatricians (geriatric doctors)** – they **specialize in caring for seniors** and have more experience treating people with **multiple chronic health conditions**, **dementia**, and other conditions that primarily affect older adults
- **Area Agency on Aging** – this is the county-level government office that serves local seniors. It's a great starting point because they connect you with **helpful local resources and government programs**.

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