

The Caregiver's Guide

Wisdom, insight and support for caregivers | What to do when your parent refuses help

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What to Do When Your Parent Refuses Help

The relationship between children and their parents can be complex and evolves over time. While there may be bumps along the way, most family issues can be resolved without lasting emotional trauma – and can actually create even deeper bonds. However, even the strongest relationships can be put to the test when a parent refuses help due to their age or physical condition.

Dealing with a parent who's in denial and unwilling to discuss their increasing need for assistance is difficult. If you've ever been stressed over this situation, you're not alone. According to a Penn State University research study, 77 percent of adult children believe their parents are reluctant to take their advice or refuse help with daily tasks.

Here's the good news: There are some simple things you can do to make these discussions go more smoothly. But first, it's important to be aware of common signs that indicate your parent needs help.



Signs your parent may not be able to live safely on their own

Living with chronic pain, the loss of a close friend, financial issues and the simple act of getting older are factors that can contribute to your parent becoming more irritable, irrational or demanding. But there are some clear indicators that reveal they may be jeopardizing their health and safety by living alone.

Weight loss

When a person isn't eating well, weight can drop dramatically. Older adults are often more susceptible as they may have

issues getting to the grocery store or simply don't have the desire or energy to prep, cook and clean up; cooking for one can be difficult, especially after the loss of a spouse. Such conditions can quickly lead to poor eating habits and malnutrition, which in turn weakens the immune system and increases the risk of developing other health concerns. If your parent has lost significant weight, consider working with a nutritionist, helping your parent with grocery shopping and meal

prep, or hiring a prepackaged meal delivery service.

Poor hygiene

Forgetting to shower, neglecting grooming habits and wearing dirty clothes are signs your parent may be struggling with cognitive decline, loneliness or depression. Checking in with daily calls, making a laundry schedule and planning events outside the home are all ways you can help. There are also home care providers that can help with daily grooming, toileting and light housekeeping.

Messy home

A cluttered home poses safety risks and can even lead to health issues. Also, check your parent's mail. Are there stacks of unpaid bills lying around? This could be a sign that cognitive decline is setting in. Consider hiring a cleaning service to check in on your parent and tidy up once a week.

Vehicle damage

Give your parent's car the once-over. If you notice new scratches or dents, this could be a sign of failing eyesight or delayed reflexes. It may be time to reassess if it's safe for them to continue driving. If it's not, contact family and friends to make a weekly schedule based on who is able to help.



Jokes about getting lost

We all have our "got lost" stories, but if your parent repeatedly says they've had trouble finding their car in a parking lot or became disoriented while walking along familiar routes, this might indicate something more serious. Their laughing off such incidents may be a defense mechanism or simply denial. Talk to your parent about being evaluated by a medical professional who can diagnose and treat cognitive health issues.

Low energy

While most everyone slows down as they age, a sudden or severe lack of energy could be a warning sign. If your parent complains they are tired and doesn't have energy to do everyday tasks, schedule a doctor's visit. Loneliness, depression, not taking routine medications properly or a newly acquired physical malady can contribute to exhaustion.

Frequent falls

More than one out of four older adults fall each year, and it's the leading cause of decline in the senior population's health. There are many factors that can contribute to falling, including lower body weakness, vision problems and vitamin deficiencies. A serious fall can quickly turn an independent lifestyle into one



that is immobile and requires extensive medical treatment, so it's important to conduct a risk assessment on your parent. Clear their house of any unneeded clutter, tack down or remove any loose rugs, and encourage them to go for walks, attend an exercise class, maintain a healthy diet and get a good night's sleep.

A messy medicine cabinet

Are your parent's medications in order or do you see a lot of bottles with lapsed expiration dates? Not taking medications regularly can obviously be detrimental to their health and can create a domino effect that results in more adverse physical and mental issues. Help organize

their meds and set them up with a medication reminder – like a smartphone app – to help keep them on track. Make a list of all medications along with the correct dosages and keep this information handy so you can discuss it with their doctor.

If you detect one or more of these issues with your parent, set aside time to calmly discuss your concerns. Unless their safety is of immediate concern, rather than suggest any action, it sometimes helps to let them think about what you've told them. Giving your parent time to process steps – such as a doctor visit or advice from objective experts – can help things go more smoothly.



Helping your parent realize they need care

When you notice your parent's actions and behavior are becoming a risk to their health and safety, use the following tips to help reduce any resistance, resentment and anxiety that may arise when expressing your concerns.

Have empathy

Be aware that your parent may be struggling with the physical, mental and emotional aspects of aging. Taking a moment to understand their mindset and being mindful of their feelings can help you better communicate your concerns. Your tone of voice, body language and choice of words can make all the difference.

Respect their sense of agency

Understanding that your parent's independence is important to them can help you identify the root cause of their behavior and determine the best way to suggest making changes.

Ask yourself these questions about your parent's behavior:

- Are they acting this way out of habit?
- Is this behavior change recent?
- Has some incident triggered this change?
- Are they worried about losing their independence?
- Are they suffering from depression or anxiety?

- Are they confused or do they have dementia?
- What are some things they may be fearing?

Keep in mind that the goal is to help your parent receive the best care possible. Even though it may feel like the parent-child relationship has flipped, avoid infantilizing your parent – dealing with a stubborn parent is not the same as dealing with a stubborn child. Your parent is more likely to cooperate if you approach them as an adult, whether it be something routine like reminding them about medications or more involved like diabetes management.

Accept the situation

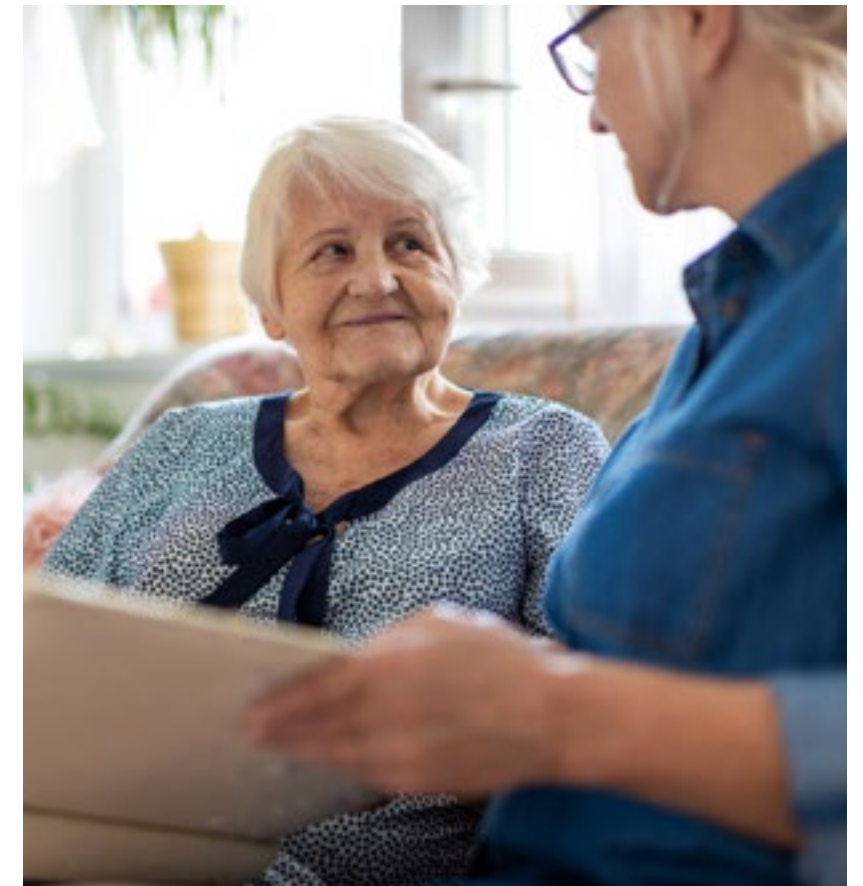
Your parent is an adult and entitled to make decisions about their life and how much assistance or care they are willing to receive. Knowing and accepting this can help reduce your stress, manage your expectations and improve your relationship with your parent.

Choose your battles

Even with good intentions, repeatedly asking your parent to change their behavior can be misconstrued as nagging. To avoid this, focus on the most pressing issues, making those that affect their health and safety a top priority. If there are several serious concerns, focus on one or two at a time so they don't feel overwhelmed. Consider having a medical professional bring up your concerns as your parent may be more receptive to accepting their advice.

Explain how their behavior affects others

While it may be easy for your parent to disregard the consequences of their actions on themselves, they may be more sympathetic when you frame how they affect family and close friends. Gently explain the stress and anxieties that their refusing help causes you, or how an unhealthy habit, like smoking,



poses the risk of second-hand smoke to their grandchildren.

Don't bottle things up

It's easy to internalize stress, which can lead to fear, frustration and anxiety and become overwhelming. Don't take everything on by yourself. Rely on family members – such as your spouse or siblings – as an outlet to share your feelings, and ask if they can have conversations with your parent, too. Finding activities and people you can confide in will help release any pent-up negative emotions.

Give them something to look forward to

Whether it's an anniversary, graduation, wedding or simply a family game night, making your parent part of a future event may encourage them to take positive actions, like bathing, grooming and dressing up for the occasion. It may also motivate them to accept any suggested care or assistance needs. Send them gentle reminders of the special date, talk about it frequently and put it on their calendar – anticipating an upcoming event can brighten their day as much as the event itself.



Quick Guide: Signs Your Parent May Not Be Able to Live Safely on Their Own

There are some clear indicators that living alone may be jeopardizing your parent's health and safety. Take a moment to think about any obvious signs that they are in need of assistance. Some signs could be an indication of anxiety, depression or cognitive impairment. If possible, discuss any concerns with your parent's physician.

Keep in mind that this guide is not exhaustive. Use the additional space to write in any other factors you may have noticed.

Possible concerning observations

| | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expired medication | <input type="checkbox"/> Moments of disorientation or confusion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetting to take medication | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor eating habits (weight gain/loss) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent falls/accidents | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor hygiene |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting lost | <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle damage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Low energy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Messy home | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

Care planner

Have an honest conversation with your parent about their ability to do the things below and ask if they would like help. Some tasks may require modifications. When assisting with daily tasks, allow your parent to do as much as possible with you by their side. Only intervene when needed or asked.

| Task | Assistance needed? | | When/how I can help |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| | Yes | No | |
| Bathing/showering | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Dental hygiene | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Getting dressed/undressed | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Getting in and out of bed or chairs | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Grocery shopping | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Hair combing | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Housekeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |

When you've tried everything, but your parent still refuses help

You've been proactive about creating a long-term care plan. You've patiently listened to your parent's needs. You've sought the advice of family, friends and healthcare professionals. You've had open conversations that come from a place of love and caring. You've done all this, and your parent still refuses your help.

Sometimes, even doing everything in your power may not be enough to convince your parent to take your advice. If your parent is unwilling to address the reality of their situation, accept that things are out of your hands and hope the seeds you've planted will sprout with a little more time. While this can feel

like a setback, don't give up hope. Keep communication open, continue to express your love and concern, and stay open to any compromise your parent may suggest that puts them closer to the care they need.

| Task | Assistance needed? | | When/how I can help |
|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| | Yes | No | |
| Meal prep | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Meal reminders | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Medication assistance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Moving around the home | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Shaving | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Transportation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Using the restroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Other _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |

Conversation builder

Use this template to help construct and guide your conversation. Take a moment to write down what you'd like to address, and record your parent's responses. Save this document for any future planning designed to help your parent live a fuller and safer life.

"I have observed this..."

"These are my concerns..."

"I can help this way..."

"What would you like help with?"

Additional resources available to caregivers

If your parent is open to it, consider other local resources that can provide assistance when necessary.

Adult day services

Assisted living communities

Companions/visitors

Home health agencies

Senior centers

Short-term stay options

Transportation services

Gentle reminder: Sometimes, even doing everything in your power may not be enough to convince your parent to take your advice. While this can feel like a setback, don't give up hope. Keep communication honest, continue to express your love and concern, and stay open to any compromise your parent may suggest that puts them closer to the care they need.

Discover more resources, insight and support at
TheCaregiversGuide.com.



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