

Your Loved is Different Since Your Last Visit



By Linda Ziac
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The Caregiver Resource Center
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HAPPY NEW YEAR!

I hope that you had a nice holiday session, spending time with family and friends.

For many people, they're able to visit with loved ones on a regular basis, but for others visits occur much less frequently.

The result is that a person may be surprised to learn how the years has changed a loved one; physically mentally and cognitively.

COMMON CONCERNS

After the holidays, we often receive calls from family members, expressing concern about a loved one that they haven't seen in a while.

Common comments we hear include:

- *"Dad looked so frail."*
- *"Mom had trouble getting up from the chair and walking."*
- *"I can't believe how much weight my aunt lost."*
- *"The house was such a mess and so run down."*
- *"At first mom didn't seem to know who I was."*
- *"It was unsettling the way that dad kept asking me the same thing over and over again."*

All too often, a senior or person with special needs wants to retain their independence, and doesn't want to become a burden on their loved ones. In order to maintain their independence, this person may attempt to hide the fact that they are struggling, and are in need of assistance.

One way that you may learn of a problem, is when you visit a loved one for a holiday or special occasion.

Another way is when you receive a phone call in the middle of the night. When you answer the phone you hear "Your mother is in the emergency room, she's fallen and broken her hip." As the closest living relative you receive the call, and within minutes you are being faced new responsibilities as your mother's caregiver.

Not all problems occur as a crisis, but instead evolve in a gradual series of warning signs spanning weeks, months, or years. You may notice that senior or person with special needs is having difficulty cleaning the house, cooking meals, paying bills, or that you are finding yourself speaking louder so that you can be understood.

A recurrent theme expressed, is the fear of broaching the subject of whether or not, a person is capable of caring for themselves. In addition, once it is clear that the person is in need of assistance, there is often confusion as to what is the best way to proceed. This is a delicate balancing act, ensuring the person's health and safety, while maintaining their independence and dignity.

One of the most difficult things for a family member or loved one is deciding when and how to step in to help. Since most people greatly value their independence, seniors and people with special needs may resent relatives and loved ones stepping in to help them - even when they have the best of intentions. And often it's unclear exactly when is the right time to step in, since the decline in a person's abilities can be gradual and almost imperceptible.

SIGNS OF A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

Some signs that your loved ones may need some extra help to remain safe and healthy, but this list is only meant to serve as a guide.

If a problem is suspected, the person needs to be seen by a professional who can conduct a complete medical evaluation and a geriatric assessment, to help determine the best way to proceed.

1. Is the person experiencing any significant vision, hearing, or memory loss?
2. Is the person experiencing any anxiety, depression, or phobias?
3. Is the person oriented to time, place, and person?
4. Is the person able to read, write, and use the telephone without difficulty?
5. Is the person able to use public transportation, or arrange to take a cab?
6. Is the person able to perform routine housekeeping tasks (e.g. laundry, cooking, cleaning)?
7. Is the person able to handle maintenance needs?
8. Is the person able to prepare meals and eat regularly?

9. Is the person able to bath independently?
10. Is the person able to dress appropriately?
11. Is the person able to manage their own finances?
12. Is the person able to handle their own banking and financial needs?
13. Is the person able to write checks & balance their checkbook?
14. Is the person able to exercise good judgment, and make sound decisions?
15. Is the person able to manage their own medications?
16. Is the person able to go shopping for groceries?
17. Is the person able to maintain relationships with family and friends?
18. Is the person able to walk, climb stairs, and remain standing?
19. Is the person able to easily and safely get up and down from a chair?
20. Is the person able to fall asleep and stay asleep?
21. Is the person able to remember family names, and appointments?
22. Is the person able to safely see & operate appliances?
23. Is the person able to drive?
24. Is the person able to hear the phone ring, and understand a conversation?
25. Is the person able to participate in leisure activities?
26. Is the person expressing any issues or concerns?
27. Is the person experiencing a sudden weight loss or gain?
28. Is the person experiencing any health concerns?
29. Is the person experiencing any bruises or cuts?
30. Is there any evidence that the person is the victim of fraud or abuse?

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

It's only natural that when we become scared or concerned about a senior or person with special needs, our first impulse is to express our concerns, and immediately look to "fix" the problem. Unfortunately this can often make the situation worse.

Unless you are faced with an emergency that threatens the person's safety or well-being, it's wise to take some time to gather information and properly assess the situation, prior to taking any action.

As I shared earlier, you are now faced with a delicate balancing act, ensuring a person's health and safety, while maintaining their independence and dignity. Effective communication is key to ensuring that the person and their loved ones can talk openly about their feelings, needs, and desires moving forward.

Once the senior or person with special needs has shared what they would like to see happen, and you have gathered information about available resources, you can now work together on creating a realistic plan of action. It is crucial to allow the person a sense of influence and control regarding decisions affecting their future.

If the history of your relationship with this person, has been a difficult one, you may want to seek assistance from a professional (e.g. certified case manager, doctor, or therapist) in order to map out a strategy for moving forward. Keep in mind that in order for there to be success moving forward, you will need cooperation and buy in from the senior or person with special needs; as well as other family members, significant others, and healthcare providers

PLAN AHEAD

When dealing with a person's current and evolving needs, taking a pro-active approach to planning is very important. Now is the time to begin planning for the future. The sooner you begin a dialogue with the senior or person with special needs about their future, the more time you will have to listen to their wants and needs, as well as to take concrete steps to complete legal documents (e.g. medical directives), and research viable resources (e.g. home health agencies, assisted living facilities.)

WE CAN HELP

The Caregiver Resource Center offers a spectrum of case management and advocacy services with flexible options to help plan for a client's current and evolving needs.

We are specialists who assist seniors, people with special needs and their families in planning for and implementing ways to allow for the greatest degree of independence, safety and quality of life.

Our mission is to assist seniors, people with special needs, and their families in understanding care issues, facilitating open communication; and providing information, support and guidance through the care process.

Some Benefits of Our Services

- Well respected company serving the community since 1990
- Assistance for seniors, people with special needs, and families; who are dealing with health and mental health challenges
- All services are individually designed to meet the unique needs of the client and their family
- We are available 7 days a week by appointment, and 24/7 for emergencies
- Our services are provided onsite (home, doctor's office, ER, hospital, short term rehab, assisted living facility, hospice, nursing home)
- Professional Support & Guidance

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit us at The Caregiver Resource Center's website

www.TheCaregiverResourceCenter.com

Call Linda Ziac at 203-861-9833

Photo from Microsoft

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Please consult your health care provider for an appointment, before making any healthcare decisions or for guidance about a specific medical condition.

Linda Ziac is the owner and founder of The Caregiver Resource Center. The Caregiver Resource Center is a division of Employee Assistance Professionals, Inc. which Linda founded in October 1990. The Caregiver Resource Center provides a spectrum of concierge case management and advocacy services for seniors, people with special needs and families.

Linda's professional career spans more than 40 years in the health and mental health field as a CT Licensed Professional Counselor, CT Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor, Board Certified Employee Assistance Professional, Board Certified Case Manager, and Board Certified Dementia Practitioner. In addition, Ms. Ziac has 15 years of experience coordinating care for her own parents.

Linda assists seniors, people with special needs and their families; in planning for and implementing ways to allow for the greatest degree of health, safety, independence, and quality of life. Linda meets with individuals and family members to assess their needs, and develop a Care Team, while working with members of the Team to formulate a comprehensive Care Plan (a road map). Once a plan is in place, Linda is available to serve as the point person to monitor and coordinate services, and revise the plan as needed. This role is similar to the conductor of an orchestra; ensuring that there is good communication, teamwork, and that everyone remains focused on the desired goal.

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