



It's a Family Affair...

(Excerpted from The Unofficial Guide to Eldercare by Chris Adamec)

As your parent ages and can no longer maintain a totally independent living environment, the family must begin to think about living and care alternatives. If funds are not available for personal care or assisted living facilities (which are private pay and not covered by Medicare), moving the parent in with your own family may be one consideration.

Many times, families succumb to their emotions or guilt trips when deciding if their older relative should move in with them. However, the decision is extremely important for all involved parties and one must move beyond the emotional issues in order to have a clear understanding of the responsibilities being assumed.

While considering how the decision will impact you and your own family, remember that your parent also has preferences. Many older people believe that moving in with children will make them a burden, or they may not want to give up the independence they have enjoyed for so many years. Relying on an "outsider" for help, such as a professional home care worker, places the person in the non-dependent position of employer, whereas relying on a family member for support gives no such sense of continued autonomy.

Consider some of the following issues when you and your parent are thinking about merging households:

- 1.** Are you and your household prepared to cope with the current and likely future needs of the older family member?
- 2.** Do you have a home large enough to comfortably accommodate your parent?
- 3.** Is your household appropriately outfitted so that his or her needs and safety can be met?
- 4.** Does your work or school schedule leave enough time for you to assist your elder in those aspects of daily living for which he/she needs help?

5. Is your family supportive of the idea that your elder will be moving in? Is your parent also happy with the decision?

An honest appraisal of the family's ability to handle caring for the older parent requires that the following items be carefully considered:

- a.** What level of medical care does your parent require? Can this be adequately provided within the context of the household?
- b.** In case of an emergency, will medical care workers have adequate access to the house and room to help your parent?
- c.** What is your elder's emotional and mental capability at this time? Can your family cope with the problems presented by advanced dementia or other debilitating illnesses?
- d.** How must you alter the physical space of the home to accommodate your relative's needs? Will one of the children have to give up a room? Will your spouse have to turn over a personal area, such as a den or work area? Are all family members comfortable with these adjustments?
- e.** What day-to-day changes in your family life will you face, such as scheduling, meals, personal engagements, travel, etc.?
- f.** How much assistance do you expect from other members of the family or household, including children? Are they prepared to make the necessary commitment and sacrifices which may be required?

Caregivers report that in most instances, major issues such as a sudden medical emergency, are not what creates family stress. Rather, dealing with daily caregiving responsibilities tend to wear down a caregiver and the family. A crisis gives everyone something to focus on and rally around, while the routine chores and obligations of caregiving may seem to go on forever, and only intensify as the older person's health begins to deteriorate.

Remember that moving an elder into the home will entail sacrifices from all family members, but it can also be the most rewarding eldercare choice a family can make. Every member of the home should be consulted before merging the family members. If all members are part of the decision, they are usually more willing to be an involved and positive part of the dynamics.

For more information and assistance in working with your older family members, contact your Quest EAP Eldercare Information & Referral Program at 1-800-253-9236. Quest is here to help.