

# **How Caring for an Aging Parent Can Change the Family Dynamic and How to Minimize the Effects**

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This subject has been on my heart lately. I have experienced caring for a mother who lost her independence. I recall so clearly those moments of sadness, exhaustion, fear, and sometimes even anger and resentment, as we tried to pull together as a family to be the help she needed. I remember how much it changed the daughter/mother relationship we had, and how bad I wanted it back. I am not alone in these experiences and

feelings. Through this business, I often find myself on the couches of an aging senior, listening to their spouse or child speak openly to us about the care they have been providing and the toll it is taking on the whole family.

Recently we were visiting a potential client who provides the majority of care for his wife. Her health issues have left her dependent on him for help with dressing, bathing and other daily living tasks. He currently is doing all the care, and can physically do it. But, he needs a break. Therefore, he was considering hiring our agency for some much needed respite. I asked him if he had any other options such as having his children take over care during some of those hours. His response hit me so hard, and humbled me.

As we sat in the living room of the home this man and woman had raised their children in, he looked at her from across the room, and he opened up to us. He told us that he doesn't want his children to take over the care for their mother, as he does not want them to see her in a different way. He wants them to look at her as their mother only, and he feared if they were doing the care for her, the family dynamic would change. And it does.

I've been there. I recall way to clearly the moments of the hands-on care that was necessary for my mother. My sister would call me in tears, exhausted, sitting in the bathroom with her. My dad moved into a role of 24/7 caregiver for his wife. I would visit for 3-4 days at a time (as they were long distance) and those visits were so different than my normal trip down. I remember looking around at the empty house, just me and my momma, thinking "Hey, where did everybody go?" Seems that now when I would come in town, they would disappear. When I would be there to care for my mom, it gave the rest of the family a chance to escape. It made me so sad, but it was our reality. We were a family caring for a mom/wife in need. And it's tough.

But that's the way we wanted it. Because when it comes to an aging or sick parent, no one else should be there except the family. Right? That's how we felt. It's what a family does. They are there for each other in the times of need. And we all were. However, things began to start impacting us after days of care turned into weeks, and then months, and then we realized this is now our reality.

I remember my mom minimizing her needs because she felt bad asking, but if you offered, she was so thankful. She just didn't want to burden us. That's how she viewed it. I remember her calling for help from the edge of the bed because she wanted to get up and walk, and tried to on her own, and was stuck barely holding herself up. I wondered what would have happened if we weren't there. I remember feeling so guilty that my sister was so comfortable with the things I couldn't ever see myself doing- bathing, bathroom help, etc. I remember my mom's embarrassment while having to be

so vulnerable us, needing things she never wanted to ask for from her children/spouse.

We see it all the time. We sit in the living rooms of seniors with their children expressing how they are lost, confused, and exhausted from trying to be ones caring for their parents. We talk with the seniors who deny they need the care, because they don't want admit they need help, and they don't want to feel like a burden to their families. But, often, something leads to a call for help. Maybe it is the exhaustion of the family members trying to get to mom's every other day to make sure all is taken care of, or maybe it's a fall in the middle of the night, as dad is now unsteady on his way to the bathroom.

So, a decision is made to reach out to someone. But who? For those who want to remain in the comfort of their own home, but can't do it alone, that's where home care can help. Caregivers can be the ones to do the needed tasks to keep seniors in their home, filling in the gaps of needed care, so that the family is relieved, the senior's needs are met, and the family dynamic can stay as it was.

Deciding to open your home up to someone to come in and do this care for a parent is a hard decision. But, the relief that comes with the help is priceless. The day we finally allowed someone to come in and talk with us about care for my mom was such a breath of fresh air. The conversation alone was a blessing. Having someone there who would listen to what we were doing, share how she could help, and guide us in those moments the caregiver wouldn't be there was what we needed. It gave us a sense of relief to know we weren't alone. Don't be afraid to ask for help. It's out there.

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