

Adult Children Can Reduce Effects of Parents' Aging

Sometimes it's difficult to watch our parent's age, but it's a natural process. Parents and adult children can work together to make adjustments and minimize the effects of aging while nurturing their relationships. Below are some ideas to help families work through the aging process from Kerri Parsons, Kansas State University Research and Extension specialist on aging.

- * Talk about aging. Be observant and ask questions, but respect each other's dignity and privacy. Be interested, but not intrusive.

- * Encourage parents to have regular medical checkups, and volunteer to accompany them, if you can.

- * Encourage older parents to make a list of current medications that they are taking and to carry it with them.

- * Encourage mental stimulation, through conversation, reading, word, card or other games, social or volunteer activity, community service or a hobby club.

- * Encourage physical activity – go for a walk or work in the garden together and explore neighborhood fitness opportunities at the senior center.

- * Keep in touch with a telephone call, e-mail – or both, if distance or scheduling makes it difficult to visit regularly.

- * Help make the home safe and accessible. Dr. Parsons says that making adjustments in the home may mean that older adults can stay in their home longer. Something as simple as removing scatter rugs, installing grab bars by the toilet or tub or adding night lights typically improves safety in the home. Replacing worn kitchenware with new, easy-to-handle utensils or lighter weight pots and pans will make it easier for older adults to continue food preparation, just as rearranging the furniture to allow more open space usually makes it easier to move about. Dr. Parsons notes that little changes may not seem like much, but they may be just enough to make it possible for older adults to stay in their own home and retain their independence longer.

Dr. Parsons concludes that the intergenerational process in which adult children move into the role of caregivers for aging parents is a transition that also can provide a lesson for the whole family. Children who see their parents caring for their grandparents usually learn respect for the aging process and parents and grandparents as well.

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Karen Thomas is a family and consumer sciences educator for Penn State Cooperative Extension of Lackawanna County.