

Moving Elderly Parents: Convincing Mom & Dad

I came across this article in A Place for MOM web site and found it to be very informative and the mirror of my personal story on how I handled moving my loved one. This is my personal story and the experience that gave birth to our company Marshall Estate Liquidators, Inc.

Recently, I had to make one of the most difficult decisions of my life. My 86-year-old mother—a sharp, independent woman who had lived alone in Burrell Boom, Belize for the last five years after the death of my father – was quickly growing frail.

While she used to cut the lawn and manicure the grounds of their 5 acre estate with ease, these tasks had become a daily battle that was physically tasking and over whelming. Not to mention all the other daily and monthly tasks that needed to be done.

I knew the discussion I needed to have with my mother. We had had the conversation about her moving in with me and my family when Dad died. She would have nothing to do with the idea. She was determined to return home and return to her life as she knew it. However, as the years passed, I was no longer comfortable with her so far away and knew that the time had come when she needed some support. So, on one of my frequent visits home, I dug deep and brought up the topic of her moving again. We discussed a few events that had transpired that was the root of my concern and I was able to show her why I was so concerned and the importance of her not living alone. It was a very productive conversation and she promised to think about what we discussed and let me know. The following day she brought up the subject and told me she would agree to move but not till the end of the year. This was February and for me the end of the year seemed like an eternity, but it WAS progress. On my trip a couple months later, her mind had not changed regarding the time frame of her move or on the decision to move. I could see she was making plans and progress towards the move. Again, we discussed it and together drew up a game plan and a timeline for things that needed to be done to accomplish this move together. By then end of the year she was ready! She was nervous and uncertain if this was the right move because of the finality of the move but she was ready. I was with her to make the final move and it all went very smoothly. I made sure that decisions were ultimately hers to make and made sure she was aware of all the arrangements that I made after getting her approval. She was able to feel that she had control of what was happening and in control of the move. She was able to choose what she brought with her and what stayed behind. I was fortunate in that I was able to move mom in with my family. Together Mom and I made the move from Belize to Houston and she hasn't looked back or regretted it.

However, for many adult children who are thinking of moving elderly parents and do not have in home facilities to care for them, the three words “assisted living facility” or “personal care home” seem foreign, cold, and impossible to utter. I hope that after reading this article and others on our site it will give you the peace of mind to move forward with the decision. We here at Marshall Estate Liquidators know firsthand how incredibly hard and necessary this decision is and we are here to help you with the moving process. We help your loved one make those tough decisions of what to bring and what to leave and we help make the transition a smooth and stress free one.

WHEN TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

The first time I broached the subject of Mom moving in with us was just after Dad died. I was concerned for her living so far away and living on her own with such a large property to take care of. I shared my concern with her and was met with sharp resistance. She was independent and determined to remain in her home. “No,” she said to me firmly. “I’m not moving.” I was caught in a difficult dilemma. How do I go against a parent and make her do what I feel is best as I try to protect her? After all she is my mom and as her child I have always done as she instructed.

Those can be the most difficult words a concerned child may hear their elderly parent say. So how does a worried family member convince a reluctant parent that moving to a long-term care facility or into the child’s home is in their best interest?

MANAGING RESISTANT PARENTS

Barry Jacobs, PsyD, a psychologist who has counseled many people in the situation of moving elderly parents, knows how difficult it can be when a parent in need of aging parent care refuses to leave his or her home. While he’s quick to say there are no magic strategies or tricks for persuading an elder to move, he suggests that adult children ask their parent to “indulge” them by visiting an [assisted living facility or personal care home](#).

“Most of us are more likely to change our position and lifestyle if such a transformation is of our own choosing,” writes Jacobs in his book, *The Emotional Survival Guide for Caregivers* (Guilford Press, 2006). “Placed under duress to change, we typically resist, regardless of the soundness of the other person’s arguments.”

And when a parent continually refuses to entertain the idea of moving? “The child needs to back off for the time being,” advises Jacobs. But don’t give up, he adds, “seek other openings to raise the issue again.”

This is exactly what I did. I backed off and periodically chose opportune times to revisit the subject - during weekly phone calls, and each visit home, which was every three months. In my favor was mom’s health and a neighbor support system. However, after five long years she finally in her own way decided that the time had come to move. This was after several events made her realize that for her safety, she needed some help.

Unfortunately, sometimes things have to get worse to get better. It may take the parent falling or being spooked by burglars or having an accident that could have ended badly or having the electricity turned off because he/she forgot to pay the bills for the realization to dawn that the parent can no longer safely reside in the home. Even then, it may take the strong urgings of the adult child/children, health care providers, and extended family members for the parent to accept the inevitable.

If the parent begins to show signs of warming up to the topic, “the child needs to emphasize the parent’s right of self-determination but also urge action,” adds Jacobs. He suggests structuring the conversation in the following way: “Tell your parent: ‘I can’t make decisions about how you should run your life. It would make me feel better, though, if we could go together to look at some possible assisted living facilities and personal care homes so that you’re better informed about what choices are available. Would you be willing to humor me in that way?’”

Which is exactly how I handled it when mom began to entertain the idea of moving. I allowed her to set the timeline and I assured her she would have as much independence as she wanted, and we were there for support as she was still a very strong and independent person. We made all the arrangements with her consent so that she was not burdened with all the details. While making sure she had the final say.

If there is a willingness on the parent's part to visit a [senior housing](#) facility, says Jacobs, "the child should proceed post-haste to set up visits at local facilities and point out that most of these facilities will allow an aged individual to try living in them for a week or a month before the person has to decide whether to sell his house and stay in the facility or return home." Experts say that can be the extra bit of comfort that can make the difference for many hesitant seniors.

TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

When it comes to [moving elderly parents](#) and broaching the "nursing home" or "assisted living" conversation, experts like Stella Henry, R.N., author of *The Eldercare Handbook* (HarperCollins, 2006) say "this is probably one of the hardest decisions a child will ever have to make." Henry, an eldercare specialist who has been featured in Time, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, says many seniors "unrealistically believe they can take care of themselves for the rest of their lives." And that's where their children or other family members can be instrumental in identifying the problems, safety issues, and instigating change.

No matter what the age of your parent, Henry and other experts say now is the time to begin communicating about the future. If you open the lines of communication early on, she says, words like "nursing home" lose their sting later on. That's important, considering that most of Henry's clients approach her with little communication groundwork laid.

"Ninety-five percent of my clients come to me in crisis situations," says Henry. The result? Confused elders, disorganized yet well-meaning children, and a family in chaos.

This is what Marshall Estate Liquidators, Inc strives to alleviate for both the family and the senior...the chaos, stress, and turmoil that can result from these situations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REGULAR CONVERSATIONS

Avoid these unnecessary results by having regular conversations with your parent about what the future holds. "Make it your problem instead of your parent's problem," adds Henry. "If you say 'you have to do this, or do that, 'you'll lose them. Instead say something like, 'Mom, I'm concerned about you; it makes me worried to see you like this.'"

That's the approach I ended up taking with my mother. After sharing my serious concerns about her health and safety, and the fact that I worried constantly because she was so far away Mom slowly came around and she finally said "Yes."

According to Henry, nine out of ten parents don't want to burden their children, and they will often respond to this sort of honest communication. "Parents sometimes hide things from their adult children because they don't want to scare them," she says. Yet, if you show them that you are trying to be their advocate, adds Henry, and that you are genuinely concerned about their wellbeing, it can make all the difference.

Sometime all you need is a go between to smooth out the transition and that is where Marshall Estate Liquidators, Inc. come in.

DEALING WITH THE GUILT

No matter how smoothly the process goes, children often retain guilt about moving elderly parents to a long-term care facility or out of the parents' home. Jacobs cautions against that. "What I point out to adult children is that, regardless of whether they promised to never put a parent in a nursing home, the decision about placement must be based on what's best for the parent at a given time," he says.

“Often, putting a parent in a nursing home is the most loving act that a child can do because it improves the quality of the parent’s life from medical and social perspectives,” Jacobs continues. “Nursing homes vary in quality but are not snake pits. Parents often thrive in them, to their great surprise.”

Or as my mom did after moving in with us and was no longer alone but surrounded by family and loving support. A special blessing was her great grand children she was now able to spend time with and enjoy.

While I have to admit that I had moments when I wondered if she questioned her decision and if Mom was truly happy with us, I eventually felt peace about my mother’s move, knowing Mom was happy with her decision to move and me knowing it was the right decision. Mom has thrived in our home and the sparkle has returned to her eyes and a glowing smile to her face as she is now home, comfortable, in charge of her personal decisions, free of the daily responsibilities that living alone brings, and safe.

FORMING A CAREGIVING TEAM

“Caregiving is a family affair,” says Henry. That’s even more reason to gather your brothers, sisters, children and uncles and aunts together to address an ailing loved ones needs. “Have a meeting and discuss the problem, without the parent present,” says Henry.

For families who have geographic barriers, Marshall Estate Liquidators can help. Our job is to see that the relocation process is stress free by coordinating the move and the decisions of what to take to the new home. We keep the desires of the family and children as our guide but encourage the senior to have a part in the decision making and planning if they choose to do so. We then handle liquidating what is left behind. Our service makes the move seamless and our seniors can walk into their new home with all of their familiar chosen treasures there in place for them. We are here to guide and support both the family and senior through the transition’s emotional and physical aspects. By auctioning off the residual personal items we not only provide the family with funds to pay for the move and in most cases have some money left over, but we also give the senior a sense that those precious treasures went to a good home and were not just discarded.

POWER OF ATTORNEY

Important items to address include financial issues and who will act as the elder’s durable [power of attorney](#) for health care. “One of the most important things is to decide who will make the critical decisions,” says Henry. Though she recommends a family approach to aging parent care, she recommends that one capable person be appointed as the elder’s primary advocate. This person, whether a son or daughter or adult grandchild, should oversee financial decisions and act as the elder’s durable power of attorney for health care.

This is a very important step. The parent should know that this power of attorney is not taking away from their ability to make decisions but will protect them in the event they cannot answer or make decisions for themselves.

As an only child, I was stuck in this precarious limbo when my father had his heart attack, was unconscious, and not expected to live. I was tasked with the decision to resuscitate or not knowing he had little chance of regaining his quality of life or consciousness. He had always made his wishes know to me but there was no documentation of it and left with the decision I at a moments notice I fought with my selfish desire to keep him with us and his spoken desire to be allowed to die. Thankfully he regained consciousness and from that point on over the next four days preceding his death he was able to make all his health care decisions. Right up to the very end. When the decision came to not provide any more medical care, he told the doctors, “Just make me

comfortable". As a paramedic, I knew right then that I had made what could have been a horrible mistake by not having a power of attorney for health care but as a child I just didn't think it would happen to my dad.

MAKING SURE ALL SIBLINGS ARE ON SAME PAGE

When it comes to approaching a parent about making a move, Jacobs says it's vital that all siblings and family members are on the same page. "It's crucial that all the adult siblings are giving their parent the same general message," he says. "It often only takes one disgruntled child who urges the parent to stay in his home to make placement nearly impossible."

AVOID EXTRANEOUS "LUGGAGE"

"When families get together, there can sometimes be personal "luggage" brought to the table," Henry cautions. She says it's best to avoid unnecessary confrontation or sensitive family subjects, for the good of the parent. "These can be emotionally charged issues," she says. "But remember, it's not about your issue, it's about what's best for your parent."

This article was gleaned from the web site aplaceformom.com and I added my personal story to it. This web site is a wealth of information and advice. Most of which I have found to be very sound advice and have used myself. Some of the articles I found on this site I have made available to you on our site.