

## 10 Things Every Family Member Needs to Know As Loved Ones Age or Become Ill

*Do to others as you would have them do to you. – Luke 6:31 NIV*

Ten specific things every family should understand and address as loved ones age or become ill are as follows:

1. GETTING INVOLVED—Families often wait until a crisis occurs before getting involved in a loved one's life and acknowledging a person's limitations or needs.

*If a loved one is facing a health-related concern, chances are he or she will face some sort of limitation. Try to observe him or her in a variety of situations to determine if he or she might be struggling with daily living activities.*

2. THE BIG PICTURE—People tend to focus on the issue at hand, not recognizing the bigger picture and how their decisions are likely to have implications or consequences.

*Whenever someone is facing a challenge or making a life-altering decision, the implications of the present and the future. Considering the bigger picture often helps families avoid getting blindsided by unexpected issues.*

3. DIAGNOSIS vs. PROGNOSIS—There is a tendency for people to focus on the illness or medical condition without giving sufficient consideration to how a medical diagnosis may impact a loved one's life.

*When a health-related concern becomes apparent, understand the prognosis and how an illness is likely to become apparent in a person's life. Also, consider how it may impact daily functioning (mental/physical).*

4. INTERACTION CONSIDERATIONS—Family and friends often treat loved ones differently when they become aware of a medical condition or limitation. This tends to frustrate care recipients as opposed to help the relationship and situation.

*Instead of treating a person differently, treat the circumstances differently. If a person is experiencing hearing loss, don't ignore them, instead accommodate his or her needs by reducing background noises, speaking slower and louder, and enunciating your words more clearly.*

5. CAREGIVER BURN OUT—Caregivers often do so much to meet the need of their loved ones that they overlook caring for themselves. As a result, they sacrifice their own health and become exhausted. There are warning signs that caregivers should be aware of.

*Become familiar with the Caregiver Bill of Rights. Many people make the mistake of focusing solely on the loved one needing care and unknowingly begin to neglect their own life and other responsibilities.*

6. SENIOR MOMENTS—Family members often fail to distinguish between normal aging and what might be a cause for concern.

*Dementia, Depression and Delirium are often confused with one another as the symptoms can be similar. If you notice a change in a loved one's behavior, seek medical attention right away.*

7. REACHING AGREEMENT—Families often make futile attempts to reach decisions or to solve a problem before they know what it is that they are ultimately trying to accomplish.

*Start by defining the issue with which you are most concerned. Seek agreement on the issue and then focus on the needs—not the wants. Next assess the options that best match the agreed upon needs to find a solution.*

8. LEGAL DIRECTIVES—People who complete their legal documents and advance directives often make the mistake of not sharing or communicating their intentions with loved ones who might be called upon to provide care or make decisions.

*Talk and ask your loved one questions such as: What are your wishes should you require care? What assumptions have you incorporated into your retirement plans in terms of illness and life expectancy? Have you considered long-term care insurance?*

9. GOVERNMENT SERVICES—People qualifying for government services are often unaware of the programs, enrollment periods and options that are available to them.

*Take time to become familiar with the government programs that you and your loved ones might be entitled to.*

10. FACING DEATH—People often view death as a taboo subject and as a result do not give it much consideration.

*Encourage end-of-life planning. Often there is a lot that families can do to make each day count and have fewer regrets if they prepare for the inevitable.*