

Loving And Caring

Many of our readers now find themselves looking after older relatives. Here we help guide you through some of the challenges

Life expectancy has changed out of all recognition in the last 50 years. A recent study suggested that half of the babies born after 2000 will reach 100. But we're already experiencing some of the downsides to old age as we muddle our way through various minefields, including

changes in family relationships, the needs of parents as they grow older and dealing with health professionals who may have limited resources. It's not surprising that, every week, we at *Woman's Weekly* receive many letters on the different aspects of this modern dilemma. These are just a few of them...



Q My 83-year-old mum recently drove my son to a football session in her car. He came home saying, "Never again. She's dangerous." I thought he was exaggerating so, the next time we went out together, I asked her to drive. And he's right. She has to be stopped - but how? She'll be lost without her car.

A Yes, but your mum would also be distraught if she has an accident and injures or maybe even kills someone. We have a responsibility to stop someone driving if we know they're unsafe on the roads. You wouldn't turn a blind eye if one of your family members took to the wheel inebriated. I know how hard it is to tell

someone that what they believe is their lifeline has to be taken away. But you could contact your local Age UK or social services and ask them about taxi and bus services, as well as the names of the local befriending charities that offer transport facilities. If you have a few alternatives ready to hand, your mother will feel less bereft and stranded.

Q Last year, my mother-in-law had a stroke and came to live with us. I was happy for her to stay while she recovered, but I'd expected that once she was back on her feet, she'd move back to her own flat. It's a year on and she's still here and I think it's time she went home. My husband is no help - he's left it up to me to broach the subject.

A There are obviously reasons why she's unwilling to leave. Is it because she's not well enough, is she scared of being alone, does she think you'll mind if she goes? Going home will need some adjustment, so perhaps you could approach this gradually and suggest that she goes home for one night a week and then, a fortnight later, two nights and so on. This way, you'll be able to assess how she is and source whatever physical and emotional support she needs to move back full-time.

Q My mother is 81 and I think she's suffering from early Parkinson's, but she refuses to go to see her doctor. Things came to a head when my daughter brought her seven-week-old baby around. My mother wanted to hold her and my daughter said, "No, you shake too much. You should see a doctor." My mother's very upset and she still refuses to see a doctor. I have no idea what to do.

A It's understandable that this is really painful. Your mother's an adult and, if you believe she's capable of making her own decisions, there's nothing you can do. But it may well be she's frightened to go to the doctor. She needs to know that you'll be supporting her all the way and you'll never stop loving her.

Q My mother is becoming frail and extremely forgetful. I'm one of four and all of us have different ideas about how to help her. We argue about whether she should go into a home, have someone come in or whether we can manage between us. Sometimes, we fight just as we did when we were children. My fear is we'll waste so much time that, if there's a crisis, it will be too late for sensible decisions.

A As soon as siblings get together to discuss their parents, they can revert to childlike behaviour, which isn't useful for problem-solving. We often develop different beliefs and values as we grow up, and different ways of tackling issues. We need to use good listening and negotiating skills, which many of us have learned in our own families and at work. Behave like an adult and the others are likely to follow suit.

Q My mother, who has dementia, moved into a residential home a year ago. She's terribly unhappy and, every time I visit, she begs to go home, but it's been sold to pay for her care. I'm very tempted to have her live with us, but she's never got on with my husband and I know there would be friction. I would also like to spend any spare time I have with my two grandchildren. What can I do?

A It must be very upsetting to find yourself in such a difficult situation and, of course, you're torn to pieces every time you see her. Have you talked to the care home? Sometimes people are really fine, except for visiting time when they remember the

past and cling to their family. If they say your mother is unhappy most of the time, then something needs to be done. It's important that your mother feels the best she can, so discuss with her carers what they can do to support her. If they're stuck or nothing improves, then alternative arrangements need to be found. If it had been appropriate for her to live with you, that would probably have happened a year ago. Look for other places she could move to that would cater better to her needs.

If she's content when you're gone, you need to try and help her to see what effect her behaviour is having on you. If her dementia means she can't understand this, try to hold on to the fact that her carers say she's doing well and try not to allow it to affect you too much.

Q I'm spending lots of weekends looking after my dad, who lives 200 miles away. He's lonely and unwell. But my husband and kids are getting fed up with it and there's a lot of tension at home. I just don't know how to juggle everyone's needs.

A It's interesting that you mention everyone's needs but not your own! It's impossible in these situations to be everything to everyone so, although it's tricky, some difficult decisions have to be made. I suggest you write down the things that need to be done for all family members - and make certain you include yourself. Leisure time is also important. Just watching TV with your children can be a bonding activity. Take a look at the list and identify who, besides you, could do any of the tasks. It may involve either employing someone or looking for help from local resources. Armed with this list, you'll be able to reduce the time spent with your father, so you can maintain your marriage and be with your children. I'm sure that's what your father would want.