



“I just visited my parents back home. They seemed slower and more forgetful. They’re very independent but I’m worried. What can I do for them now?”

Whether your parents live an hour away or across the country, knowing if they need help is not always clear-cut. Learning more about their situation can empower you to respond more productively when they ask for help or when an emergency or health crisis prompts your assistance.



First, check your own concerns

If you’re worried about your parents, you’ll likely receive a better response if you wait a beat before jumping in to fix things. First, list your observations and concerns. There are often signs that indicate help is needed sooner rather than later. Did you notice prescription medications mixed together or scattered about, a lack of food in the refrigerator, neglected personal care, unpaid bills, car dents or missed medical appointments. If your list includes these or similar items, it’s wise to talk these over with your parents soon, preferably in person.



Have a conversation

If your parents say they don’t want to burden you, or your family culture doesn’t fully support questioning them, try approaching the conversation this way: It would help me to know your wishes and preferences if something happens and you’re unable to convey that. This puts the burden on you instead of pointing to your parents as a problem. Ask open-ended questions and listen with empathy, non-judgement and your full attention. Your parents may gladly welcome your help, or they may accept help only with one item after multiple conversations. Every family is different. These questions will help guide a conversation while gathering more information:

Home Safety: Are you concerned about tripping? Do you tire easily when climbing the stairs, find some areas of the house too dim or dark, find it hard to get in and out of the shower or tub?

Nutrition: How are you handling meal prep? Are there foods that are now difficult to eat? When did you last visit the dentist?

Health and Medication: Who are your doctors? What prescriptions are you taking? How do you keep track of when to take what?

Finances and Bills: Is paying the bills and sorting through medical insurance becoming a chore? Where are your bank accounts and who has access?

Emergency Readiness: What are the names and phone numbers of your neighbors or friends who you’d contact locally if you needed help?

Fraud Risk: Do you ever receive phone calls or mail from people asking you for money or demanding information from you? How do you respond?



Plan Ahead and Learn About Community Resources

Trusted neighbors, friends, relatives or even paid care managers nearby can be your eyes and ears. Keep phone numbers handy, along with contact information for doctors, pharmacies, attorneys, local fire and police and so on. It's wise to also have access to financial and insurance information, and legal documents. Find out who to contact in their local area for transportation, personal care services, nutrition assistance, repair services, legal services, and other assistance.

Your local Area Agency on Aging can help with local resources. Find them in our [Services by State](#) map or visit the [Eldercare Locator](#) website.



Your Role as a Long-Distance Caregiver

Supporting from afar doesn't always mean doing everything for your parents, but it does mean getting more in sync with their life. With time, you'll be better positioned to help keep your parents safe, informed and connected.

Helpful caregiving resources:

- [Handbook for Long-Distance Caregivers](#)
- [National Institute for Aging Caregiver Handbook](#)
- [Balancing Career and Caregiving](#)
- [Where to Find My Important Papers](#)
- [Holding a Family Meeting](#)
- [Personal Care Agreements](#)



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