

## Caring While Respecting Wishes

Once upon a time, a caring daughter felt mom was no longer capable of living safely at home – using the stove, climbing the stairs, etc. - and wanted to move her to the assisted living facility down the road. After all, the facility was very nice, and the people who worked there were lovely and there were no worries about cooking or laundry or cleaning. But mom didn't want to live there. She wanted to live in her own home. And she fully intended to live at home until she died.

For many, that "Once upon a time" is now. Many children become caregivers, and they do so with the best of intentions. That daughter wants her mom to live a long life, free of injury, pain, or tragedy. When she sees mom slowing down, she begins to worry about keeping mom safe in her home. But is there a time when safety becomes more important than being in your own home, a time when a parent's safety overrides his or her right to choose where to live? This is an ongoing question concerning "quality of life," "quantity of life," and which is more important to you.

So, should we ask the question, "How do I get my mom to move into an assisted living facility?" or, "How can I make mom's home as safe as possible so she can have her wish of living at home until she dies?" And we also have to wrestle with this one: "How can I feel okay about having her live in a situation that has some potential dangers?"

The answer begins with communication, preferably before a crisis arises. Parents and their adult children should have conversations about how parents want to live their later years while the parents are still capable and healthy. If the opportunity to discuss these things with healthy parents has passed, it is up to children to do their best to determine how they *think* these questions would have been answered by the parent.

Keep in mind that some people treasure their independence and life in their own home (quality) so much that they would rather risk injury and a shorter life (quantity) than move out. Answering the question of what matters most to those needing care (quality or quantity of life) can help caregivers make decisions.

The next step is carrying out those wishes. This can be difficult when a parent's wish differs from the adult child. What happens when the parent wants to live at home but the son feels it is unsafe? If "quality of life" is the priority, the son can work to make the home as safe as possible. The son also has to let go of some of his own ideas of what is best. Try not to waste precious time arguing, trying to convince mom or dad that your way is better.

Sometimes granting a parents' wish may become very complicated. What the parent wants may not be possible due to the declining ability to make good decisions. There are also times when neither child nor parents' wishes can be met. In these situations, do your best to provide safety *and* dignity when making your decisions.

When you understand what is important to your loved one, what his/her beliefs, principles and priorities are, it is easier to face difficult situations that may come your way. Contact the Aging and Disability Resource Center at 262-833-8777 for help in finding resources and to create a safe environment for your loved one.