

## When Is It Time For Assistance?

Have you ever asked yourself the question “Is It Time for Assistance” when trying to support your aging loved one? It is a question that is on the minds of many people today. Older adults are living longer due to advancements in healthcare, nutrition and technology and want to maintain their independence for as long as possible. That’s the positive side of the coin. The more challenging side is that often, adult children or family members are drawn into the “care-giving” cycle, voluntarily or involuntarily. They may find themselves ill-prepared for this new role and can feel overwhelmed. If you are in this situation or know of someone who is, the following questions may help to clarify the situation:

- Are you concerned about the person’s well-being?
- What changes are you observing?
- Has there been a recent episode of ill-health?

The answers to these questions may shed light on difficulties that the older adult is experiencing. While some challenges may be more overt, others may be subtle. Impaired vision, hearing loss, changes in behavior or cognition, loss of appetite, mobility issues, problems with activities of daily living such as bathing and dressing, and trouble managing medications may be easier to spot. Areas that may need a gentler, more probing approach may include trouble managing personal finances, inability to manage home maintenance, diminished driving abilities, self-isolation, and the fear of living alone. Any of these issues may indicate the need for assistance.

Once the challenges have been pinpointed, it’s important to find resources that can support the older adult. Community-based resources such as your local Senior Center, Council on Aging or Aging Service Access Point (ASAP) agency are a great place to start. They can often provide information on support groups, transportation services, and memory cafés. If the older adult has returned home from a rehab stay, they are typically set up with nursing services through a selected Visiting Nurse Association but may benefit from additional private home care services. Other solutions may include setting up an emergency response system (pendant), and if needed, a medication dispenser, arranging for a professional “check-in service”, setting up grocery delivery from an online retailer, or arranging for cleaning and laundry services. If there is concern for the individual’s safety in the home, a home safety evaluation can be conducted with suggestions for implementation of modifications. Another option is to hire a geriatric care manager or eldercare consultant who can manage the process of supporting the older adult when family or friends are not available to take on the task or if they are feeling overwhelmed.

It is important to remember that sometimes older adults may not be ready to ask for help. They may be embarrassed, in denial or simply feel they can manage their own affairs without assistance. A respectful approach coupled with practical solutions can enable the older adult to live an independent life on their own terms while getting the supports they need.