



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Are you Trying to Parent Your Parent?

As our parents' health declines, we can find ourselves providing them with increasingly more care and support. Sometimes when this happens it can feel as though the roles have reversed and we are now parenting our parents. We may catch ourselves telling them what to do, what we think is best for them and forgetting that they are still adults with a lifetime of experience who are capable of making choices for themselves. If your parent has dementia, Alzheimer's or is in any other way cognitively impaired the degree to which they can make decisions for themselves will vary based on their unique situation.

Although we may be tempted to parent our parent, it isn't helpful for many reasons. They are still your parents and you are still their child regardless of your age. The dynamics of that relationship has been established over a long period of time. Also, with your aging parents remember that you are not in the role of having to teach them how to go out and function in the world. They've already been there and have their own wisdom and experience.

In addition, your parent may be experiencing feelings of loss and frustration around changes in their health, independence and mobility. This will impact how receptive they are to suggestions from you. The more you try to do for them without checking with them first, the stronger these feelings of loss and frustration will be.

Avoid nagging them about their habits or telling them how they should behave. Boundaries and respect are very important. Rather than telling them what they should need, do or feel; ask them how you can help them or what they need from you?

Ask rather than assume. When we make assumptions they are based on what would work best or make it easier for us. Clinical Counsellor Allison Reeves says the role of family caregiver is to support the person needing care in living their life as they want to, based on the current circumstances.

Are you meeting resistance? Step back and examine your own behavior. Resistance often happens when we are trying to tell someone what to do or to control their behavior based on our own agenda.

Put yourself in their shoes. Remember you will likely one day find yourself in a similar situation. Think about how you would like to be treated, regardless of your physical or mental limitations.

By Barbara Small, Program Development Coordinator, Family Caregivers' Network Society