



Bright Horizons®

Insider Guide



How to Help Your Parents Age Positively

Global demographic shifts mean older people are a growing and significant part of every community. Our attitudes and actions towards the older relatives, and the older population in general, must change.

“When I am old I shall wear purple...”

Positive Ageing is a concept which encourages a forward thinking approach to later life, so that preparing well for the future becomes the norm. It's about maintaining a good attitude, feeling in control, looking ahead, planning, and 'prevention rather than cure'.

People who age positively tend to be healthier, live longer, and enjoy a better quality of life. The insightful words of Jenny Joseph's poem *Warning* summarises the freedoms we can all enjoy when unshackled from the cares and responsibilities of earlier life.

With default retirement age (formerly 65) now phased out, most of us can work for as long as we are able - many of us will work well into our seventies! Unfortunately, with the elder years comes potential frailty and illness that we are not always ready to cope with. As working adults, often with children of our own, there comes a point when we are forced to recognise that whilst our own parents are still independent and active, they are not getting any younger.

So how can we help our parents, in-laws, and older relatives get the most out of their later years?

Areas of support

There are key areas where we can offer support:

- Health and fitness
- Staying connected
- Financial security
- Emotional support



If our loved ones maintain a positive attitude to ageing they are likely to live more fulfilled, happier lives. Communication around changes in health, well-being and ability becomes easier as the experience is better understood and shared by the whole family.

Having knowledge and understanding of the products and services that support age related issues can reduce stress and absenteeism in the work place. This supports greater choice in our response to the situations we face, so we can take more effective action. Awareness gives us the best chance at managing our career and work responsibilities alongside our caring commitments.

Practical challenges

As working parents and carers, we have busy, often complicated, and sometimes stressful lives. This may mean we don't have the time to fully consider ageing and the associated changes occurring within our family. It is essential we begin to plan for the inevitable conversations to support our loved ones.

Maintaining health and fitness

There are two important ways to keep ourselves and our loved ones fit as we grow older; a healthy diet and enough regular exercise. As we grow older, we must make adjustments to our diet by adapting calorie intake to changes in activity levels. When older people maintain significant physical exercise, for example regular walking and time out in nature, studies observe lower stress levels and increased well-being as well as slowing down their loss of mobility.

Addressing decreases in mobility and changes in health

With decreasing mobility, changes may need to be made to living arrangements:

- Simple modifications, for example ensuring wheelchair access, fitting stair lifts, or preparing a downstairs bedroom may be necessary
- Visual or auditory support may be required, such as a vibrating alarm under a pillow linked to the smoke detector
- Visits from fire prevention teams can be arranged to discuss safe use of gas and electrical appliances.

It is advisable to revisit these conversations regularly as the situation will change. Arrange for their neighbours to have keys in case you are away for extended periods of time or they notice something is not right. You may wish to set up a system of routine check-ins if you cannot make regular visits yourself.

Maintaining social networks and activities

Older people engaged in communities tend to be happier and healthier. It is important to find out what activities and services are available locally and how they can be accessed - consider public transport, lift-shares, and befriending schemes.

Social networks for our ageing family members often means face-to-face, but increasingly our parents may be using online networks as family and friends move away or become less mobile themselves.

Providing technical advice and support for our parents and older relatives opens up new communities and networks to them; this is especially important for those caring from a distance.

Financial security and legal planning

Financial matters can lead to the most difficult family conversations which makes legal planning well ahead of potential crisis points essential. Securing Legal Power of Attorney (LPA) is an essential step to begin planning for the future. There are significant benefits to having it in place and quite serious consequences if it is not.

Identify whether your older relative is a self-funder; if so, what should you be thinking about? Care options are a big subject, and it is essential you have the advice and support to navigate your way.

Deciding on the right type of care for you and your relative is a good place to start.

Emotional challenges

We often adopt a solution-driven approach to caring and overlook the more subtle emotional support our loved ones need. How can we empathise more fully with their changing situations and be present to their concerns?

Managing an increased reliance on others

- Positive communication from family is a vital ingredient in supporting this shift. We need to be 'present' for our parents and older relatives, and carefully managing commitments and responsibilities to allow this
- Agree regular times for phone/Skype calls and visits, as this gives them something to look forward to and a routine
- Broaden the topics you talk about; this can help your older relative maintain outward perspective and resist certain introspective behaviours.

Managing difficult conversations

Conversations such as those about giving up driving, excessive gardening, down-sizing, and accepting help at home can be tough. This aspect of ageing represents a sensitive shift in authority as the 'child' begins to take on the role of carer.

Our parents and older relatives must retain some authority and choice, where possible, in all decisions. We need to listen to their needs and involve the wider family in any decision-making; positive conversations with siblings can support this so it is important to work out any differences.

Dealing with feelings of sadness and loss / bereavement

Changes, such as no longer being employed, can lead to our parents experiencing a loss of 'self'. Medical research clearly demonstrates that when it comes to our brain, we 'use it' or 'lose it'. Ways to help prevent this include:

Volunteering opportunities

- Befriending schemes
- Helplines
- Further education
- Classes at local libraries and community centres.

With increasing age comes the prospect or reality of widowhood and losing close friends. The emotional challenge of frequent loss and regular funerals can have significant impact on our older relatives' well-being.

Fewer friends and less contact with others can increase isolation.

Our own emotional well-being

For many of us in the 'sandwich generation', we are left with limited resources in terms of time, energy, and finances as we manage the caring responsibilities of dependent children and parents. All of this can have an impact on our work life balance.

Increased recognition of carers in the workplace means there is now more opportunity to have the 'big conversations' at work too. Workplace Carers Networks can provide an invaluable resource for information and support; the right to request flexible working and 'carer's leave' can help us manage difficult situations and maintain work+family - whether this provides temporary or longer term solutions.



Further information

For more information on Positive Ageing topics, please see the resources below.

Resource	Website	Contact
Good Care Guide Find, rate and review care	www.goodcareguide.co.uk	Email: support@goodcareguide.co.uk
The Silver Line Helpline	www.thesilverline.org.uk	Telephone: 020 7224 2020 Email: info@thesilverline.org.uk
PayingForCare Info about long term care	www.payingforcare.org	N/A
Grandparents Plus Charity supporting the role of grandparents	www.grandparentsplus.org.uk	Telephone: 07495 216 677 Email: info@grandparentsplus.org.uk
Positive Ageing Positive thinking on issues about later life	www.positiveageing.org.uk	N/A
Action for Ageing Information based website	www.actionforageing.com	N/A
<i>The Selfish Pig's Guide to Caring</i> Book written by Hugh Marriott	www.amazon.co.uk/Selfish-Pigs-Guide-Caring-emotional/dp/0749929863	N/A
How to live to 100+ TED presentation on Ageing	www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-jk9nj4XWk	N/A
Direct Gov Advice on benefits and time off for dependents	www.direct.gov.uk/en/employment/employees/timeoffandholidays/dg_10026555	N/A

Recommended Service



Back-Up Care

We provide a trusted safety net when regular care plans are disrupted, for last-minute emergencies and upcoming gaps in care - but you still need to work.

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