



Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via **Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI)**. Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org.

10 Secrets Elderly Parents Keep from Their Families

Your aging parents may be keeping secrets from you. It may not be lying, but they might be purposely withholding information that can be important to their health, safety, or general well-being. Sometimes parents hide things because they feel as if their independence is slipping away or because they are embarrassed to ask for help. In some cases, they might be afraid of how their family will react. Sometimes it is as simple as not wanting assistance or that they don't even recognize something as being dangerous or problematic.

Many elders cover up bruises, don't tell anyone about their falls or accidents, downplay many troubles, and hide their alcohol use in the hopes that they can continue to live independently. Each competent person has a right to make their own decisions whether they are good or bad, about how they want to live. But when our aging loved one begins to keep secrets like these, they are putting themselves in danger, and increases the likelihood that they will have to rely on others to care for them.

Since many seniors are keen on keeping these concerns to themselves, it is up to family members to keep an eye out for the signs that they may be experiencing any of the following medical, emotional or financial issues.

10 Common Secrets Seniors Keep

1. Falls

Falls are the leading cause of injury, hospital admissions, and even death among the elderly population. It can be easy for seniors to cover up falls, particularly if it does not result in a bruise or broken bones. Your loved one may hide these accidents out of fear that you will try to get them to use mobility aids like a wheelchair or walker or even increase their supervision. The preservation of independence is of major importance to older adults, even at the risk of falling. Unfortunately, frequent falls and the resulting injuries are common factors for moves to assisted living communities and skilled nursing facilities.

2. Pain

Some seniors seem to almost enjoy discussing their aches and pains with others to gain sympathy, but others tend to downplay their symptoms. Your loved one may not tell you about a new or an increasing pain to keep you from worrying about their new condition. They might not want to be prescribed even more medications or be dragged to another doctor's appointment. Perhaps they may be afraid of receiving a new diagnosis and what that could mean for their independence. These concerns are understandable, but as a caregiver, you need to be aware of their pain levels so you can get them the proper medical treatment they need.

3. Dizziness

Dizziness can be caused by a few different medical conditions, including low blood pressure and medication side effects. Although your loved one may not want to alarm you, this is a potentially serious and dangerous problem that needs to be addressed. Feeling unsteady and lightheaded can contribute to mishaps like falls and/or car accidents.

4. Auto Accidents and Driving Infractions

Seniors wish to retain the freedom and independence that driving provides. Therefore, if your loved one is in an accident or receives a driving violation, they often withhold this information out of the fear that their family members will take their car keys away. A traffic citation or fender bender can be indicative of any number of health concerns, including worsening vision, mobility issues and changes in mental awareness.

5. Money Shortages

If a parent's income and savings begin to dwindle, they may cut back on buying necessities like food and medications. Seniors who are having financial difficulties can seek assistance from federal, state, and local government programs as well as community initiatives.

6. Frivolous Spending

Elders sometimes get into the habit of making unnecessary, even unwise, purchases. They might frequently buy from television shopping channels, catalogs, telemarketers, direct mail pitches or the internet. Parents hide these purchases out of the fear that their spending will be restricted, and their financial independence will be taken away. As a caregiver, keep an eye out for the appearance of new items and even strange merchandise. If you suspect your loved one is making excessive purchases, check their credit card statements or checkbook. This may sound underhanded, but as a caregiver, financial planning comes with the territory.

7. Gambling

Many elders gamble out of boredom to fill their free time. The casinos are aware of this and often target elders with advertising and marketing ploys on television, the radio, the internet, and via direct mail. Many gambling houses offer “senior special” meal prices to draw elders to play the slots and game tables. However, gambling can quickly get out of control and lead to serious financial troubles.

8. Elder Abuse

Elder abuse comes in many different forms and can be committed by family members, neighbors, or even paid helpers. If a senior is being abused or neglected by someone close to them, it is likely they will not report it to avoid repercussions like causing a major rift in the family. Recent studies estimate that less than one in seven incidents of physical elder abuse are revealed to caregivers.

9. Financial Abuse

Although it is wrong, it is not uncommon for a family member, friend or hired caregiver to help themselves to a senior’s funds. Your parent might not even be aware this is happening, but if they are, they may not tell you about it because they want to retain control of their finances. Financial abuse is a type of elder abuse and it is a crime. Without any intervention, the crooks can continue stealing and your parents may wind up financially devastated.

10. Alcohol or Drug Abuse

Some seniors may begin to drink more, use drugs or abuse their prescription medications. This can be extremely dangerous, as alcohol and both legal and illegal drugs can conflict with prescribed medications and even lead to addiction. Keep an eye out for changes in mood or personality in your loved one. Look out for empty alcohol or medication bottles, or frequent trips to the pharmacy. If you do suspect abuse, address the issues with your loved one in a non-confrontational way. Contact their doctor for any advice that may be helpful as well.

How to Address a Parent's "Secrets"

Family members must be hypervigilant to detect any issues their aging parents may not want to share. It is important to try and develop open communication from the very beginning, but not every family can have candid discussions. If you have a feeling that something is going on, address it immediately but be gentle and supportive. Do not judge, preach, accuse or dictate. The goal is to form an alliance with your loved one. Emphasize that your goals are the same as theirs: ensuring their safety and quality of life and helping them maintain their independence.

Beginning these conversations can be awkward, but some of the following ideas can help give you a starting point:

- Share an article or magazine story with them about the topic you wish to discuss.
- Be straightforward and simply ask permission to talk about the topic with them.
- Solicit support from siblings, their doctors, a religious leader or another person your parent respects to facilitate the conversation.
- Ask them if they had any experiences helping their own parents or grandparents as they aged.

If your loved one does not cooperate, you might be forced to do a little detective work. In-person visits can help you keep a close eye on their living situation, their health and safety, and potentially their financial status. Another option is to ask the family doctor to speak with your loved one. Many elders are more comfortable discussing issues and concerns with professionals than with close family members.

In the end, you can only be as helpful and involved as your parent will allow you to be. If they are of the sound mind, then they are free to make poor decisions and must take responsibility for their actions. Just be aware that some of the above "secrets" can point to changes in judgement and mental capacity. If you believe your parent is no longer capable of making rational decisions about their own care and money, it is important to intervene. Adult protective services and your local Area Agency on Aging or Resource Center (Senior Resources of Guilford) can help get vulnerable seniors the support they need.

This article was adapted from *Aging Care: 10 Secrets Elderly Parents Keep from their Families*, By: Marilyn Sharbach Ladew, Updated December 18, 2018.

****If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available to you contact our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org***

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford's SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program
Completing the Care