

Feeling Overwhelmed? An Aging Life Care™ Manager Can Help

By Margaret Kunes, MHA, CMC



As we age, life becomes a delicate balancing act between independence and safety. Adult children are often faced with the challenge of stepping in to assist aging parents while respecting their autonomy. For those overwhelmed by this process, there's a solution: Aging Life Care Managers.

Aging Life Care Managers are different from patient advocates, senior advisors, senior navigators, or elder advocates. Members of the Aging Life Care Association (ALCA) must meet stringent educational and experience requirements, often holding certifications from national organizations. All Aging Life Care Managers adhere to a strict Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, ensuring that your loved one receives expert, compassionate care.

Recognizing When Help Is Needed

Do you suspect that your aging parent or loved one might need assistance? If you find yourself asking this question, it's a good indication that the time to intervene is approaching. Older adults fiercely guard their independence, often brushing off concerns over minor incidents like a burnt pot or a fall, assuring family members they don't need help. But safety is critical, and maintaining it can become a challenge as aging progresses. *Here are six warning signs that indicate your aging parent may need help:*

- 1. Decline in Personal Hygiene:** If your parent is wearing soiled clothing or is no longer bathing regularly, this could signal deeper issues. Infrequent grooming or poor oral hygiene can be a telltale sign of physical or mental decline.
- 2. Expired or Rotten Food:** A fridge full of outdated food is one of the first red flags. Spoiled food, an unclean kitchen, or a strong odor from the refrigerator are signs that your loved one may not be managing basic household tasks.
- 3. Unpaid Bills and Piled-Up Mail:** When mail starts piling up and bills are left unpaid, utilities may be at risk of being shut off. Managing finances can become overwhelming for someone struggling with cognitive decline or physical limitations.
- 4. Medication Mismanagement:** If your parent is struggling to take their medications correctly, this could be due to changes in vision, dexterity, or memory. Full bottles, untouched pill organizers, or spilled medications are signs that intervention is necessary.
- 5. Concerned Neighbors and Friends:** It's often neighbors or friends who spot issues first. If they are reaching out with concerns, this is something to take seriously. They might be stepping in to help where they can, but that's not a long-term solution.

- 6. Car Trouble:** New scratches and dents on the car, missed maintenance, or a refusal to let others drive could indicate that it's no longer safe for your parent to be behind the wheel.

The Role of an Aging Life Care Manager

If any of these signs sound familiar, it's time to have a conversation with your loved one. These talks can be difficult and emotionally charged, but help is available. Aging Life Care Managers provide invaluable support in these situations. They offer an objective perspective and help mediate family discussions to create a plan that balances safety with your loved one's desire for independence.

An Aging Life Care Manager can step in to assist with everything from coordinating medical care to finding appropriate living arrangements, making referrals to needed services in areas like finances, legal, social and more. They bring expertise and knowledge that can ease the strain on families, helping ensure that your loved one's needs are being met.

"Aging Life Care Managers have access to so many resources to help older adults take charge of their aging process," says Margaret Kunes, Care Manager Certified (CMC) and CEO of Aging Life Care Charleston. "So many people tell me, 'I wish I knew about this sooner.'"

Whether your loved one is resistant to change or your family is in disagreement about next steps, an Aging Life Care Manager can help make the process smoother and more effective. They bridge the gap between generations, offering peace of mind to adult children and helping older adults navigate the complexities of aging with dignity and support.

When Should You Seek Help?

Even noticing one of the warning signs above is a clear indication that it's time to act. Don't wait until a crisis occurs. Engage in proactive discussions about your aging loved one's care needs, and bring in a professional Aging Life Care Manager to help mediate and create a care plan that everyone can agree on.

With their expertise, you'll no longer have to navigate the maze of aging care alone. Whether your concern is finding a safe living environment, managing complex health needs, or simply ensuring your loved one is getting the personal support they require, Aging Life Care Managers can make a significant difference.

Find an Aging Life Care Expert Near You

If you're feeling overwhelmed, you don't need to face this journey alone. To locate an Aging Life Care Expert near you, visit aginglifecare.org and search for professionals by zip code.