

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam,

My mother has a sister who is 78 years old. She lives alone. Over the past six months we have become aware of some things that we are worried about.

She is still driving, but having accidents; so far nothing serious has happened.

We don't think that she is staying on top of her bills and it isn't because she doesn't have the resources.

She seems to have become mistrustful of people around her, including her doctor, and now we are worried that she isn't getting adequate medical care.

My parents have tried to help her, but she doesn't listen to them. They don't want to alienate her or make her more upset, so their hands are tied. Yet, I know that they feel responsible for her and don't want anything serious to happen.

What can they do to help this situation?

I am also concerned that this is taking a toll on my parents.

Worried Daughter

A. Dear Worried Daughter,

I don't know if your aunt has been evaluated by a health professional, but it sounds as if you are dealing with some serious changes in her physical and/or mental functioning.

The key is balancing between necessary support for your relative and drawing realistic boundaries about what you can allow to happen. Sometimes it is advisable not to rescue relatives and friends from various behaviors. Allowing a mini crisis may serve to avert a larger one.

Being supportive does not mean allowing the relative to engage in dangerous behaviors such as continuing to drive when his/her ability and judgment may be impaired. This does not only mean playing a role in having the vehicle removed. This means offering rides or help in shopping, etc.

Although the situation is related to an older adult, families may resist seeking guidance and/or help for any family member because they are concerned about the stigma of having a family member with problems. A family member with a problem can stress and overwhelm the family.

Seeking help from outside sources is often a way to support the relative and maintain needed boundaries.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

Our son is graduating from college in May of this year. While we are very proud of him, we were somewhat surprised to find that he did not have any job prospects and plans to come back home. We love our son, but this was not our idea of what would happen after graduation.

How do we convey our pride in him and at the same time let him know we don't think it is a good idea for him to move home?

Parents of a College Graduate

A. Dear Parents of a College Graduate,

You need to separate your son's graduation from his coming home. He has achieved one level of independence and you need to help him see that coming home for any length of time is contrary to his continuing to grow and mature. If you sense that he has a problem, or if he tells you there is one, encourage him to get help right away.

It is also okay to let him know that you are not prepared to house him on a regular basis. Parents often feel very guilty about not being supportive to their children. You have every right to let him know that you consider your role in his life as more peripheral now.

After you have the above discussion, you establish a time frame for his stay at your home. Also what activities toward getting a job is he involved in? You can establish some expectations for this as well.

Finally, you are not operating a hotel, nor should you feel obligated to offer free room and board. It is perfectly reasonable to expect some rent, etc., even if it means he works at a minimal paying job while looking for a more professional one.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail jfsneny@banet.net or call 518-482-8856.