

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 parents have been married for 60 years. They are in relatively good physical health, but my father has suffered from a bi-polar disorder for many years. As they have gotten older, my father has become more difficult. He refuses to do some of the things that he should be doing as he ages. He won't see a family doctor and I think he is developing some health problems.

There are some other issues as well that I feel compromise my parents' safety. I have talked, pleaded, threatened to try and get some changes, but to no avail.

My mother has not been much help, always siding with, or making excuses for, my father.

What can I do to get them to listen?

End of My Rope

A. Dear End of My Rope,

You probably can't do anything else to get them to listen. If you come upon a serious safety issue, you may have to act without their permission.

However, just because you are worried and know certain things should be done, it may be beyond your ability to have them listen to you.

They have been together for 60 years and have found a relationship that works for them. Your mother may agree with you, but she is not willing to change the balance they have created. After all, when you leave, she has to stay and must live with your father.

You need to try and find a way to not feel responsible for what you can not control.

Perhaps if you approach your mother with more understanding of the position she is in, she might feel more inclined to let you try to help. But if you make her feel defensive or forced to make choices, she may retreat to her old and familiar position.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

I am an older woman, age 86. I suffer from heart disease and I have already had a stroke.

My dilemma is that my children will not discuss any issues around my death.

I have a will, but recently became interested in a living will and a health care proxy. I feel very strongly that I do not want any extraordinary measures to stay alive. They do not understand my position and whenever I raise the discussion, they say something like, "Mom, you'll live forever, let's not talk about it."

I know they are uncomfortable with the idea of death, but I need to name a proxy. If I name one of them, he/she may not carry out my wishes.

What should I do?

No One Will Listen

A. Dear No One Will Listen,

You need to listen to what your children are telling you. They are unwilling to take the responsibilities entailed in being a proxy. It would be unfair to ask them to commit to doing something, which they probably couldn't carry out.

Find another relative, a trusted friend, or an attorney and name that person as a proxy. That way your children will not have to deal with both your death and their possible guilt about not following your wishes, if the situation should occur where a proxy is needed.

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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 madler@jfsneny.org or call 518-482-8856.