

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**, Miriam Adler of the Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Two letters this week discuss the issue of seniors remaining at home.

Q. Dear Miriam,

My parents live in a private home that they have lived in for 40 years. They are both in their 80s. I've noticed some changes taking place over the years, but this spring, for the first time, my father did not go out and start the yard work. My mother was always on top of the book-keeping, but when I visit I notice that the mail is piling up. We have talked about their moving to an apartment or to some kind of setting that provides some services.

They are adamant about not moving.

I have two questions. Should I be insisting that they move, and if not what can I do to get help for them so they can safely stay in their home?

Concerned Son

Q. Dear Miriam,

My mother lives in Albany and I live out of town. My mom has been a widow for the past five years. I thought she was doing relatively well. She has been healthy and is now in her late 70s. When I talk with her, she tells me everything is okay. She has been sounding different to me recently, so I planned a visit.

Unfortunately, I found that she was not doing well. The house is not kept the way it used to be. My mother no longer seems to take pride in the way she looks. The neighbors told me that she hardly goes out anymore and no one comes to visit. The immediate neighbors and my mom used to visit each other regularly, almost like an extended family. My mother has gradually taken herself out of that group.

My mother wants to stay in the house, but I worry about her being so isolated. Are there any services or programs that can help in this situation?

Far Away Daughter

A. Dear Adult Children,

You are both concerned about your parents' aging in place safely and with some quality to their lives. Studies have shown that

being able to stay in one's home is preferred. Of course the benefits must outweigh or at least balance the liabilities.

Precisely because of the kinds of issues you have both raised, we at Jewish Family Services (JFS) applied for and received funding from New York State for the Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NNORC). You may contact JFS to see if your parents live in the designated NNORC area.

However, even if they do not, we would be able to help you assess the situation each of your individual parents is facing and make recommendations and referrals to services.

There are services available, but often they are not easily identified.

By providing just a minimum of help, sometimes an older adult can remain safely at home.

The key to helping older adults is not as much about providing service, but getting the seniors to a point of accepting help and paying for it. Older adults are often reluctant to admit to any needs for fear their children or others will see it as a sign that they should move.

The NNORC concept is to bring a community together to assist its older residents to stay at home. With that knowledge, many older adults will accept services. In each of these cases, the services needed could range from someone to help with outdoor work, to do some bill paying, or a professional to come to the home to do a mental health assessment and offer treatment.

Both of you should call JFS or a similar agency to discuss your individual concerns. The agency may need more details to help you develop your next steps.

Adult children need the support and guidance to help them negotiate this stage of their parents' lives.

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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@jfsnny.org or call 518-482-8856.

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