

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 husband and I are in our late 70s. Our son who is developmentally disabled and in his 50s lives with us. We have always taken good care of him, better than anyone else would have been able to do. He has never been part of any community programs.

We are concerned about his future because there isn't anyone else to take over when we are gone.

What are our options?

Aging Parents

A. Dear Aging Parents,

When your son was diagnosed as disabled, I am sure that the choices for care outside of the home were not as acceptable as today. The care options for disabled children are better than in the past, but still need improvement.

However, you do need to make plans for your son's physical care and financial well-being. Since this could take some time, you should start now while the three of you are both able to participate in the process. Contact an attorney who specializes in disabilities and estate planning since it is crucial that you set up financial matters in a way that will enhance your son's future choices. Also contact a center for independent living in your community. They can provide you with information about living arrangements, entitlements, job opportunities, etc.

Even though you don't have any relatives to take over for you, you may have family members who would be willing to stay connected to your son. You won't know unless you share your wishes and plans with family. Many families make the mistake of assuming they must shoulder all of the responsibilities alone.

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Q. Dear Miriam,

I am in my 80s and live with my disabled daughter. I have always been her caretaker, but my physical condition now requires that she help me. She has never held a job or had any responsibilities. In retrospect, I realize this was a mistake.

However, is there anything that I can do now to help my daughter understand the need to assist me and perhaps even offer her some training?

Needy Mother

A. Dear Needy Mother,

I recently attended a regional meeting in preparation for the White House Conference on Aging. The problem you are experiencing came up as an issue that needs addressing as so many Americans age.

There is not a specific answer for you at this time, but I suggest that you contact a center for independent living in your community to see if they know of any training opportunities for your daughter. Also, if you have some financial resources, you may be able to hire someone to instruct your daughter on how to better care for you.

Although you didn't mention this, I suspect that you are trying to stay in your home as long as possible in order to provide a home for your daughter. It would be wise to explore living possibilities for her now so that you have the flexibility of planning for yourself without worrying about her.

Another interesting issue this raises is the possibility of some form of assisted living accommodating two generations of elderly with different needs.

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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.