

Being Present in a New Season of Life

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- Being present to your loved one's situation
 - What is their physical condition?
 - What is their mental condition?
 - What is their financial situation?
 - What are their hopes and wishes for the rest of their life expectancy?
 - Does the person have an up to date will, medical power of attorney, and power of attorney? Does the medical power of attorney outline their wishes should they be incapacitated?
 - Are you able to help realize them? Are you able to follow through with their wishes regarding termination of care, etc?
 - What are things you need to know in order to realize their wishes?
 - Wait lists and costs for retirement communities
 - Where are the legal documents?
 - Where is the key to the safe deposit box?
 - Who is to be notified in cases of medical emergency and death?
- Respect their agency
 - There can be a profound sense of loss during the aging process: loss of loved ones, of independence, of full health. Tread carefully, yet honestly.
 - Respecting their agency eases this process and helps them to feel as though they have not entirely lost control.
 - Have discussions while they are able. It can be helpful to do this in small chunks. Write down small details that will be helpful should they be incapacitated.

- Sometimes it will not be possible to do what they ask due to financial constraints, availability of assistance, etc. Work to formulate Plan B with them.

- You are entering into their reality each time you interact.
 - It can be a good day or bad day. Try not to minimize the bad days, and celebrate the good days.
 - If your loved one has dementia, there will be situations in which your loved one is in a past reality or some alternate reality; as long as it is safe, go with it and do not argue.
 - Music and poetry remain wonderful touchstones during interactions with people who have dementia. These can ease things for both of you.
 - Questions can be very frustrating for a person with dementia; instead of asking, "Do you remember when....?" say, "I remember when you/we...." This eliminates a sense of awkwardness if the loved one cannot remember.

- Emotional labor: take care of yourself, too.
 - As much as is possible, if you are not able to be fully present with your loved one, do not force a visit.
 - Therapy, support groups, and friends not enmeshed in the situation can be hugely helpful.
 - If you have siblings and others who are interested in your loved one's well-being, ask for what you need as far as support.

- Your loved one is now and forever a beloved child of God.
 - Even if your loved one is not awake or is incapacitated, speak to them directly.
 - Remember the things your loved one has enjoyed throughout the years.