



Ask An Expert Does Aging Mean You Need to Move? 5 Key Questions to Ask

Question: I'm concerned about my mom staying in her home alone. Since Dad passed away a year ago, the house seems too big for her, and she's slower going up and down the stairs. How can I convince my mom to move to something more manageable, where she won't be alone?

For anyone with a close bond to their parents, watching them get older can be a difficult process. It's hard to reconcile the active, busy parent we remember growing up with, to the slowing, sometimes frail person we become in our later years. But is asking them to move out of their home the answer? It's certainly a big decision, especially when you are relocating someone who has lived in the same home for 30 or more years.

When I work with my clients (and my clients are always the parents in this situation - though I love to involve caring family members), I try to meet their needs for comfort, safety and a rewarding social life with as little disruption and stress as possible. That is why I begin my client work with five key assessments. These will help you and your mother determine whether moving is an appropriate action to take right now.

1. Is the home environment "slipping"?

Take a look at the condition of the living quarters. Is it being kept up to its usual standards? Or is the cleanliness slipping? I do not look for neatness where a person has traditionally lived with clutter, but if the clutter has turned into an overwhelming situation that threatens health, it's a warning sign that they can no longer "keep up" with the home. Clean bed linens, well-maintained litter boxes, and garbage cans that are emptied regularly are good signs that a client is managing, even if there are many knick-knacks and paper piles.

2. Is the client eating an adequate diet?

Check the kitchen. If the client has traditionally cooked for him/herself, and has stopped, you may find the cupboards emptier than usual, or the fridge becoming full of past-due, uneaten ingredients. Perhaps the variety of foods they make has narrowed to toast and a boiled egg, because that's all they have the energy to prepare. This would be warning sign that they need help preparing and eating a balanced diet. On the other hand, if the client is still enjoying cooking at home, or enjoys eating out or with friends, it may not be time yet to make a change.

3. How is the social life of the client?

Especially when my client has recently lost a loved one, he or she may feel a huge gap in their social life. That's why I ask if he or she still goes out with friends and family, or welcomes people into their home. If the answer is "yes", it's a good sign that they are coping. But if they feel isolated or "shut-in", a move may be helpful.

4. Do health issues restrict their routine?

Independent adults can generally come and go at will, and carry on with their normal routine. But sometimes this can be disrupted by something like giving up a driver's license, or having trouble getting up and down stairs. I check to see if this independence has been compromised, but could be

made better by living in another location, such as an apartment close to public transportation, or with amenities close by.

5. Does the client feel they need to move? Why?

If we have gone through the health and safety measures above and my client is caring for him or herself adequately, and getting plenty of social interaction, then we go over the other reasons they may want to move. Sometimes the client says "I've lost someone close to me" - either a spouse, or a neighbour who checked in daily. Perhaps in that case, a change in routine, such as joining a club or taking up a new hobby while staying in place is an adequate solution for now. Other times, the issue is "perhaps I should do it now, before I HAVE to," or "my children are worried that I'm not safe". Often, I can find a solution with my clients that can freshen up the home and improve its liveability, allowing my client to stay there longer, and at the same time help them prepare for a future move once their home really is too much for them to keep up.

Moving your home when you are aging can be a big decision, and can come with a lot of stress. I know I have done my job well when my client's quality of life improves, and they go from just "surviving" to "thriving" in their environment, whether it's the home they have lived in for 40 years, or a new home that matches their physical, emotional and social needs.

Give Changing Places a call at 250-721-4490 for a free consultation. We're always happy to hear from you!