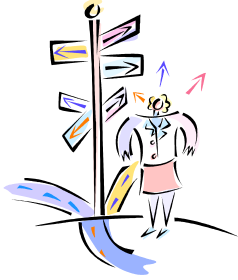


Elder Options, Inc.
Resource Library
Subject: Decisions



Who Makes Your Decisions?

Is a person unable to make decisions after she/he reaches 75, 80, 90 or beyond? As aging individuals progress into older age, there is a prevalent belief among some that older people cannot make good decisions and consequently, should not! What causes that opinion? Is it true?

It's only too readily apparent to those of us that are aging that there are physical changes that occur. Hair turns white or falls out. Eyesight weakens necessitating glasses and corrective surgery. A hearing aid is purchased albeit reluctantly to assist in hearing. Health conditions may worsen or become chronic. A walker or cane accompanies the person. Routine tasks are accomplished but in a more deliberate manner. The body slows down and moves slower. The rush has gone out of life. Elders become thoughtful about decisions. The older person may feel competent to make decisions but may recognize the limitations due to health issues and thus experience a vulnerability that they may not share with others.

Adult children may see their parents, grandparents and other aging family members less. Assumptions of good health and continued independence allow the relationships to continue with little interference. The elder may perpetuate the myth that "everything is fine" anticipating that unwelcome interference may occur if too much of the situation is disclosed. A serious healthcare crisis will the children home all primed to make the decisions and fix the situation.

If the individual is competent to make her own decisions, it is not the adult children's job to assume that role. Competency can be a subjective opinion depending on who you ask but in reality, the person's doctor can help make that determination. There are short standardized tests that geriatric professionals can give that will help in this situation as well. The older person may only want and need moral support and someone to bounce ideas with, not someone who comes in and just takes over.

It sometimes takes a professional to advocate for the elder who is very competent to decide life issues but whose family is determined to have it "their way" for the good of Mother or Dad. Families usually think they have the best interests of the elder family member at heart but may not consult with the elder beforehand, may gang-up to pressure the elder to make big changes without thinking through the repercussions, may not offer choices of several alternatives, and may not think about supporting the person where they already are. A bout of the flu may catch the elder parent at a weak moment and the adult children exact a commitment to move closer to them. Who does that benefit, the parent who leaves their home and all that's familiar or the adult children who now don't have to feel guilty when Mom is ill and they are so far away?

It's altogether too common that the elder gives up his/her autonomy and the family accomplishes a take-over because of fear. The elder fears the loss of the adult children's love, respect, and support. The children fear the loss of the parent through death. So they grab the person close and hang on for dear life knowing in another part of their brain that regardless of where the parent lives the time is limited. Wouldn't it be a good idea to remember the elder needs a quality of life that is acceptable to him or her also and consider his/her opinion and his/her right to self-determination?

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