

Catholic Caregivers

'Caregiving is pro-life!'

When Mom or Dad Moves In

Having your parent come live with you may be the right move, but that doesn't mean it will be easy for either generation. Being aware of each others feelings and concerns can help make the transition a smooth one.

Here are some points to consider:

- *The move is stressful for both your parent and you because it's a time charged with emotions.*

Your father is grieving not just because he has lost his family home or own apartment, but because he has lost his way of life. He may have had to say good-bye to his friends, neighborhood, and parish. Then too, the change has more than chipped away at his sense of independence and control. He doesn't have a home anymore. He must accept the fact he's living in his son's or daughter's home.

It's hard to give up some of your privacy, and ask your spouse and children to do the same, by having someone new move in with you.

You may be grieving also. It's hard to watch a parent's health deteriorate. It's hard to see the family home—the home of your childhood—up for sale. It's hard to give up some of your privacy, and ask your spouse and children to do the same, by having someone new move in with you.

The result can be that both of you—parent and adult child—feel as if you must tiptoe around the other person, holding in any emotion that might be considered negative. But if this new arrangement is going to work then, like all strong and healthy relationships, it must be based on a loving and respectful honesty and openness. On a two-way street of communication willing to accept and give helpful criticism as well as praise.

- *Your parent needs to be given as much control of her life as possible.*

Things that might seem trivial to you can be important to your mother. Ask if she would like to move in at the beginning of the month or the 15th. Let her decide how to decorate her room. What color would she like it painted? What material and pattern for the curtains? What furniture and other household items would she bring with her? Putting her favorite

chair in your living room or family room can mean a lot!

Reducing a house full of belongings, collected over a lifetime to fit into a single room can be a very difficult task. Be respectful as you help her sort out the items. Old newspapers, trinkets, and bric-a-brac might be priceless to her. Treat every item as if it were a treasure. If giving it away is too painful, you may need to find more storage space.

Let your parent decide what she will take with her to your house, what she will toss, what she will give to charity, what she will give to family members. Keep in mind that Mom may want to distribute a good deal of her possessions while she is still alive. She's not being morbid; she just wants to enjoy seeing each person inherit his or her special gift.

- *Maybe your parent would like to be given some household duties.*

Dad may feel less like a burden and more like a contributing member of the family if he takes his turn drying the dishes or one evening a week oversees a homework session. But don't expect a built-in baby-sitter. You have to think, if Dad can't live alone, can he safely watch my kids?

- *Your parent needs more than food and shelter; your parent needs your emotional support.*

The dramatic change in your parent's life and the host of emotions that comes with that change can easily lead to depression.

Even if Mom was strong and optimistic when she lived on her own, the dramatic change in her life and the host of emotions that comes with that change can easily lead to depression. You need to be available. You need to realize there is also a time commitment on your part with this arrangement.

Having your parent move into your family home can be a tremendous blessing if each member remembers a home is more than just a house, a family is more than just a group of people living together.

Each member is entitled to a loving and caring environment. That's the goal facing all of you: How—together—you can make that happen. □