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## Seniors

By Linda Fodrini-Johnson



Linda Fodrini-Johnson, MA, MFT, CMC, is a Licensed Family Therapist and Certified Care Manager. She has been practicing professional care management since 1984. Linda founded Eldercare Services, a full-service care management and home care company in 1989, which now employs over 200 caring people. Eldercare Services has been providing Bay Area families with care management, home care services (caregiving), advocacy, counseling, support groups and education for 29 years.

What do you do when you notice a close family member or friend having more and more challenges with memory or making sound decisions ... and how should you approach this sensitive subject?

Recently, I was asked to do a podcast interview with a geriatrician. She asked me if there were any books for families dealing with this beginning stage of a dementia that brings on worry and concern. Sadly, my answer is that I could think of none that just addressed this issue.

When my mother first started to exhibit some lapses in judgment or memory, I didn't want to confront it head on for two reasons: 1) I did not wish to see this fiercely independent woman (who was driving all over San Francisco with friends a decade younger than her) lose her independence. I needed her to be my strong role model even at 86. This is called denial. 2) My clinical background said I just needed to gather more information before jumping to conclusions. So, I started a log of times she forgot to take the keys out of her garage door as she drove away, or repeated the same story to me five times, or when she went to see six different doctors with vague symptoms.

I had been providing my mother a personal assistant once a week since she was about 80 years old. She just needed someone to help her with organizing paperwork and following up on the telephone for her when she had questions regarding a bill or an upcoming medical appointment because her hearing was impaired and phone calls were challenging. Her personal assistant came for two hours a week and was amazed at how well my mother was. She was my gatekeeper as mom's memory and judgment started to fail. Her dementia was from small strokes.

Not everyone has this type of information and monitoring of a parent at a distance or even nearby. Often those with dementia like Alzheimer's disease are socially appropriate for a long time into the illness, and even the family doctor might miss it on routine appointments. But, when you have the red flags that safety is at risk, it is time, or probably past time, to jump in. Start slowly, maybe with someone you call a friend or a trainer, when they are really a paid caregiver from a reputable agency, like Eldercare Services.

If you jump in and say, "Mom your memory is failing," most likely you will be faced with total resistance and denial. How each of us approaches a parent can make all the difference in the success of the intervention. The best way to design a good plan is to bring in a third-party expert, called a professional geriatric care manager, that will give you the most chance of success with your intervention. You might have a hard time with being entirely honest with a parent, but a professional care manager can help you to design "therapeutic fiblets." These are sometimes called white lies that are to be used to reduce stress for everyone, and most of all protect the self-esteem of the person with the early stage dementia.

If an evaluation has not been done, the care manager will help you make that happen and connect you with the best dementia screening clinic in your area.

At Eldercare Services, we have classes on caring for someone with a dementia. We start our next series at 5:30 p.m. March 21; classes are complimentary and held every other week for a three week period. We also offer a free support group for families held on the second Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. in our office. Advance registration is required, please call to register at (925) 937-2018 or visit [www.EldercareAnswers.com](http://www.EldercareAnswers.com).

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