



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Five Tips for Helping Aging Parents *from HSHS St. Joseph's Hospitals in Breese and Highland*

BREESE & HIGHLAND – People worldwide are living longer. Today most people can expect to live into their 60s and beyond. Every country in the world is experiencing growth in both the size and the proportion of older persons in the population. By 2030, 1 in 6 people in the world will be aged 60 years or over.

According to the World Health Organization, aging can be associated with several life transitions such as retirement, relocation to more appropriate housing, death of friends and partners and health/mental health conditions. As people age, they are more likely to experience several conditions at the same time. If people can experience these extra years of life in good health and if they live in a supportive environment, they may be able to still do the things they value and enjoy life. If these added years are dominated by declines in physical and mental capacity, the implications for older people and for society are more negative.

Lori James, BSN, RN, program director of senior renewal at HSHS St. Joseph's Hospitals in Breese and Highland shared, "As family members age, adult children and their parents may take on new roles that require extra care and empathy to work through. Autonomy, being independent and having self-determination in an individual, is something that anyone would choose at any age," she said. "But studies have found that senior adults around the world are denied independence and autonomy as they age, when others might think they are not capable of making their own decisions."

While aging parents may need help, adult children and/or caregivers can provide that help while also enabling their parents to live fulfilling lives. The Senior Renewal program at HSHS St. Joseph's Hospitals in Breese and Highland suggest these five ways to help aging parents while continuing to give them autonomy:

1. **Clear communication** – Listen to aging parents, take their concerns seriously and work with being their advocate. Adult children should ask aging parents how they would like to solve their problems, offer choices and talk about decisions based on the values of the parents or parent. Adult children/caregivers should not assume they know what is best for their aging parents. Talking openly can empower aging parents so they can continue to make confident decisions.

2. **Respect** – Aging adults crave dignity and respect as their life’s circumstances change. A study published in the Annals of Family Medicine found that treating aging adults with dignity can impact their health and well-being in a positive manner. Be open-minded, show appreciation, patience and compassion. If the roles were reversed, it is how you would want to be treated.
3. **Helpful assistance** – Independence is important to seniors; adult children can offer this help without trying to force it. When offering this help, it has been shown that it can help make the adult child feel they are part of the life of their parent or parents. It is also important to let the aging parent know how they continue to contribute to the lives of others.
4. **A sense of control** – Studies have shown that if seniors feel a lack of control, their self-care habits can be affected. Adult children who insensitively point out problems with aging parents can put them on defense. Rather, focus on the things you appreciate about your parents. Communicate clearly with words and actions so the aging parent knows you have their best interest in mind.
5. **Positivity** – Adult children should encourage their aging parents to participate in activities that can bring them joy. An optimistic look at aging can help focus on the positives and not the negatives of aging. Demonstrating gratitude, showing appreciation for someone, and returning a kindness can help decrease depression and strengthen relationships.

James shared, “Aging doesn’t have to happen alone. There are a lot of resources available to help seniors live active, fulfilling lives.”

The Senior Renewal program at HSHS St. Joseph’s Hospitals in Breese and Highland is an outpatient program for adults (generally) 60 years and over who are dealing with issues such as depression, anxiety and “nerves.” The program works to restore a sense of well-being and quality of life and helps participants return to the peak of their capabilities. For more information about the Senior Renewal program or to schedule an assessment, call 618-526-5699 (Breese) or 618-651-2940 (Highland).

Additional resources are available through the Illinois Department of Aging at ilaging.illinois.gov or by calling their Senior Helpline at 1-800-252-8966.

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