

# JACKSON COUNSELLING and FAMILY THERAPY

*Family, Couples, Individual & Adolescent Counsellor*

Helpful Articles by Jenny Jackson



## Caring for Aging Parents

It can come as a surprise to realize that our roles have changed when we now have to care for our parent(s), having been cared for by them all our lives. This change of roles may come with some sadness or grief – that that stage of our lives is over now, watching their increasing vulnerability and their decreasing strength and capability and that they are nearing the end of their lives. It can seem overwhelming if you're working and still have children at home as well.

We may now be the ones reassuring, soothing, encouraging. Maybe we will have to help our parents make decisions, take over physical care or pay the bills. This may involve setting up home support or moving them into full time care and selling the family home.

So how does the family manage this? In some families everyone plays a part – a team approach. However what if the family are spread geographically or not on speaking terms? There are several things to consider.

Be careful of assuming that one particular person will handle it. Perhaps there is one person who slips easily into care giving roles. Other common assumptions are that the daughter will do it or someone without children at home or who isn't in paid work. However try to establish who does and who doesn't want to be involved. How much is everyone able or willing to do? Perhaps there are things that family members can do from a distance – support by email and phone calls or financially.

How about looking after yourself through this process? It's really important to consider how much time and energy you have. How much is needed? For instance is it within your family's capabilities to keep Mum or Dad in their own home? Is it possible for you to have your parent live with you – do you have the energy, skill or support necessary? For everyone's sake you need to answer these questions as honestly as possible.

So you need to know what options are available. Talk to your parents GP about a Needs Assessment to establish what level of support is needed. You could talk to someone at Age Concern or check out their website which has good information about a range of issues including home support, rest homes and retirement villages.

Abelard House, 518 East Coast Road, Mairangi Bay, North Shore, Auckland  
T: 09 478 2501 M: 021 167 0308  
[www.jacksoncounselling.co.nz](http://www.jacksoncounselling.co.nz)  
Email: [jenny@jacksoncounselling.co.nz](mailto:jenny@jacksoncounselling.co.nz)

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So having established what the plan will be ensure you look after yourself. Don't let caregiving take over your whole life. Make time to have fun and recharge your batteries - keep up social activities, friendships, time with other family members, exercise, hobbies and especially so if you're working. Warning signs that things are getting out of balance may be that you're getting impatient or irritable with your parents or others, your sleep pattern has changed, decisions are harder to make, you're sluggish getting going in the morning, or you're starting to isolate yourself from others.

Communication is just as important at this stage of a family's life as at other times. Keep talking to and checking with each other including, of course, your parents. Invite others to help, ask directly for help when you need it. If your family is unwilling or unable to support you it may be helpful to have a talk from time to time with a counselor.

**Helpful Contacts:**

[www.ageconcern.org.nz](http://www.ageconcern.org.nz)

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Email: [jenny@jacksoncounselling.co.nz](mailto:jenny@jacksoncounselling.co.nz)

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