

Promoting Independence in Older Adults

Independence is important for anyone, but it is essential for elderly adults. It may be the only factor they feel they can control in their lives when many aspects of their lives are changing.

Some adult children may struggle with empowering their elderly parents to remain independent without compromising their safety. The following tips are ways to instill a healthy sense of independence and self-esteem.

Make Home Modifications

In order to set up an elderly parent for success and independence, it is important to ensure the home is optimally modified and hazard-free. Some basic home modifications may include:

- Installing rails in the bathroom to prevent slips, falls, and serious injuries
- Lowering pantry shelves so an elder can assist themselves comfortably
- Installing ramps for seniors in wheelchairs or with balance issues so they can move around the home easily
- Improving lighting in poorly lit, potentially hazardous areas

Keep Them Updated

Often, keeping up with the latest technology can become a great source of independence and pride for elders. Teaching your elder to become familiar with assistive technology is an effective way to instill independence for an elder who is aging in place. These technologies may include:

Medical alert systems that operate as standalone products (necklaces, bracelets, pagers, or remotes) or applications within a smart phone. These systems are easy to use and monitor at-risk elders; if an elder falls, an alarm button can be pushed which connects the elder to an emergency contact or service, such as 911.

Smart-home devices such as the Amazon Echo or Google Home can assist with automated lighting, reminders to take medication or to schedule an appointment, and convenient ordering of household products.

Encourage Routine

Having a daily routine can encourage elders to maintain independence through managing everyday tasks and having a sense of purpose. Studies also show that seniors with routines are healthier mentally and physically.

A healthy routine might include exercise, socializing and well-planned meals, followed by restful sleep.

Emphasize Social Wellness

For elders, staying social is especially important. Studies show that loneliness and social isolation in elders can cause serious health issues including a 50 percent increased risk of developing dementia. Additionally, if a senior does not have a social circle, they may become dependent on family members for all activities and tasks.

Social activities for elders could include joining a social club for their favorite activity, auditing a class at a local college, volunteering, or becoming a member at a fitness center. Empower your elder to use technology and social media to keep in touch with friends through calling, messaging or video chatting.



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