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It's the holidays – whatever holidays you celebrate at this time of year. You are seeing family and friends that you haven't seen since last year at this time. How has this year been for those elderly family members? During your visits, are you noticing some changes in the behavior and health of your parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, or even older siblings? Now is the time to take care of these changes before they get worse.

[U.S. News and World Report](#) identifies eleven questions to ask of your aging relatives that will help you determine if your loved one needs some assistance. Sometimes you need to be a detective. Look in the refrigerator for old, expired or lack of food. You might also take a look at the mail. Is your loved one able to handle finances and management of the home?

Remember that some memory loss is part of the normal process of aging. However, changes in thinking processes, the ability to make decisions and a change in personality are keys to knowing that something is seriously wrong. Dementia doesn't develop overnight. When you put the pieces together, you may find that over the past year you have been noticing more changes in your loved one's cognitive capacity. [Elaine K. Howley](#) has written an article that will help you identify these changes and give you suggestions on how to handle memory issues.

If you are staying with your loved one for several days, you will have many opportunities to observe moods. Depression during the holidays may be normal as your loved one remembers holiday celebrations. Being able to differentiate depression from sadness will be a key to determining if your loved one might be suffering from depression. It is normal to feel sad about loved ones who are no longer with us during the holidays. Those feelings of sadness that last for days at a time or interfere with one's ability to complete daily tasks (like getting up in the morning and getting dressed) are a [warning sign of depression](#).

You may also notice some safety concerns in your loved one's home. Are there obvious fall risks? Would it help keep your loved one independent by installing safety bars in the bathroom or making sure there is adequate lighting on stairs and in hallways? The [National Council on Aging](#) has released a complete guide for home safety for older adults. The guide is filled with tips for every room of the house as well as the exterior and the home systems like electrical and heating. The report even includes a useful printable checklist for home safety.

When you notice some areas of concern, you don't want to bring these up at the dinner table. Instead, find a quiet time when you can address these concerns with your loved one. Be careful that you don't make your loved one defensive. Don't overwhelm them with every one of your siblings and their spouses and the grandchildren present during the discussion. Keep in mind that this discussion may take more than one session. Be prepared with notes so that you can stay focused on the most immediate concerns. This article from [Daily Caring](#) gives you some ideas on how to start the conversation.

Throughout this process, know that your concerns for your elderly loved ones are based in your love for them. "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." — **Leo Buscaglia**