

## September Senior Sense: How to make decisions when you are dealing with uncertainty

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As summer winds down and COVID cases rise, many of us, likely most of us, are anxious about what's ahead. We now know that COVID isn't a sprint - perhaps not even a marathon, and we must learn to live with fear, uncertainty and doubt for the long haul. As family caregivers, we all know a little something – we know about fear and uncertainty already and we've doubted our abilities to make the best decisions on behalf of the people we care for. So, is this our fate? Or is it our secret weapon in navigating the next phase of this pandemic? Maybe a bit of both...

This fall and winter, caregivers will again be called upon to make tough choices. Once again, you may be trying to decide if you should move a parent into a senior living facility or move them out. You may be trying to decide if you should return to the office where you can advance your career or choose to work remotely and reduce risk of contracting and transmitting COVID. You will be thinking through the risks and rewards of isolating and socializing. Even seemingly trivial, daily decisions may feel fraught – go to the grocery store or pay a delivery fee, for example. And you will doubt yourself along the way.

But know this: as a caregiver you possess one of the best tools for decision making: a strong internal compass. Trust me - and trust yourself. I speak to dozens of family caregivers every week and they all share this trait: they all have a strong sense of what is important– and caring for their family is high on that list. This matters because as Roy Disney, of Walt Disney Co. said, "When your values are clear to you, making decisions becomes easier."

When I was caring for my parents, I moved them a total of 6 times – in and out of memory care, assisted living, hospice and skilled nursing. Each time, I agonized over the choice. Would they be happy? Would they be well cared for? What would other people think? Could we afford it? Was I making a mistake? I didn't know the answers to any of those questions prior to making my decisions. What I did know was what I valued: I loved my parents. I wanted them to get quality care. I was willing to spend money to support them but also had to manage long term financial considerations. I wanted them to be in close proximity to me. When I focused on those things I knew, the decisions became simpler and the last question – was I making a mistake – became irrelevant.

In addition to trusting our guts and hearts, there are other ways to cut down on the fear, uncertainty and doubt of making decisions in the coming months.

- 1. Ban the word "should."** You simply cannot make good decisions if you base them on what other people think you "should" do. No one else knows all that factors into your decision. No one else knows your values! Nor do they need to.
- 2. Stop what-iffing.** Sometimes we are unable to make decisions because we become paralyzed thinking about all of the possible consequences of our choices. What if something happens to my father in the nursing home? What if my mother falls after I move her in with me? We cannot control other people's fate. We can only act with best intentions.
- 3 Avoid "always and never" thinking.** Small, simple decisions became enormous and complex when we apply "always and never" thinking to them. If COVID has taught us anything it is that change is certain. Mask mandates change. Vaccinations and variants make an impact in how we live. Strip your thoughts of the words always and never because nothing is forever.

As you navigate caregiving during this next phase of the pandemic, please know this: when you act with a clear head and heart, you cannot make a mistake. You can only make the best decision possible with the resources and information you have in the timeframe you have to act.

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