

# It May Be Time to Contact an Aging Care Professional

I turned 55 in March and just realized that I am now what they call “middle-aged.” This seems to have happened quickly, as I have heard many others say before. Suddenly you wake up, your kids are grown, you are immersed in work, and your body doesn’t feel the same way it did in the past. But nothing brings this stage of your life into focus, like getting the emergency phone call about an elderly parent who is experiencing a medical emergency. Would you believe that I received two of those calls within three weeks of each other? One for my dad and the other for my mother-in-law (MIL), or as I like to call her, my mother-in-love. And just like that, my work and my personal life collided.

My mother-in-love is an independent, active 80-year-old who lives on a farm in rural Oklahoma and still takes care of her chickens, runs the tractor, and manages a garden that produces delicious veggies that she cans and shares with the family every year. She also takes care of her aging dog, Boots, who has more ailments than I can list. Suffice it to say, she has to carry him outside to do his “business.” And that is what caused the emergency phone call we received. It was 19 degrees outside and snowing. My MIL takes Boots out early each morning, which is how they start their day. As she carried Boots down the steps, she slipped and fell. According to my MIL, the dog went flying, and so did she. Instantly, she was in terrible pain and knew that she had broken something.

As a geriatric social worker, this does not come as a surprise to me. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, around [36 million falls are reported among older adults resulting in 32,000 deaths each year](#). In addition, one out of every five falls results in an injury, such as broken bones or a head injury.

So, as you can imagine, I have been waiting for something like this to happen. I have tried on multiple occasions to get my MIL to agree to wear a medical alert pendant to no avail. My husband and I even offered to do all the legwork, sign her up, and pay for the monthly subscription. However, her response was always, “don’t waste your money on that. I always have my phone with me and won’t wear it.” But guess who didn’t have her phone with her on that fateful day?

She told me she heard my voice in her head while she was lying on the ground in freezing temperatures. I asked her what I was saying, and she told me that I said, “I guess this would have been a good time to have listened to Amy about getting a lifeline.” It took her over an hour to drag herself across her deck and into the house. She could not reach her phone, and she laid on the floor for over four hours until my 16-year-old niece came by to see how “Nana” was doing, since she was off from school on a snow day. My niece called 911 and her parents, and then the real excitement began. By that time my mother-in-love was seen in the emergency room she had a raging fever, was dehydrated, and was in excruciating pain.

Surgery and a three-week stay in an acute rehabilitation unit ensued. My sister-in-law, who lives close by, called asking me to come and help her with all of the care coordination work needed. Fortunately, due to my line of work, I was able to spring into action quickly. My sister-in-law knew that she needed me, but how do families without an aging life care professional know when they need to engage one and what questions to ask?

When caregiving for an aging family member becomes overwhelming, it may be time to contact a geriatric care manager. Reach out to a professional if the person you are caring for is experiencing any of the following:

- Has multiple medical or psychological issues
- Is unable to live safely in their current environment
- Is not pleased with current caregivers and requires advocacy
- Is confused about their financial and/or legal situation
- Has limited or no family support

Or consider contacting a professional if your family:

- Has just become involved with helping the individual and needs direction about available services
- Is either “burned out” or confused about care solutions
- Has limited time and/or expertise in dealing with handling the individual’s chronic care needs
- Doesn’t live close
- Is at odds regarding care decisions
- Needs education and/or direction in dealing with behaviors associated with dementia

*Assisting with an aging family member can create all kinds of emotions for those involved. Bringing in a trained advocate who can help navigate the ups and downs of this journey can be a true blessing. At Chambliss, we are committed to helping you and your loved ones manage difficult times. If you or someone you know needs our care management services, please contact me, [Amy Boulware](#).*

*\*Nationally, you can find more information on the [Aging Life Care Association website](#).*