

# Your Personal Coach

By  
Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

**Dear Kathleen,**

**My dad is almost eighty years old. My mother died a year ago and he lives alone in a small town about an hour from where I live. He's not getting any younger, and I would like him to come live with my husband and me, but he says he's happy where he is. It just breaks my heart to think of him rattling around that big old house that he and my mom shared for more than fifty years. What can I do to change his mind?**

**-- A devoted daughter**

Dear Devoted,

I feel certain that you mean well. You sound genuinely worried about your dad, and as though you want to do what you think is best for him. But unless there is some reason that your father cannot make decisions for himself, I think you should honor his preference to live where he wants.

Very often, aging is associated with declining mental and physical functioning, and in those cases family members may have to make difficult choices about how much care an older relative needs. It can be excruciating to have to tell our mother or father that they can no longer manage without help, and they will either have to come live with us, or move into an assisted living or nursing home.

But age alone does not determine whether an individual needs extra care. Many older people -- in their eighties and beyond -- are in good physical and mental health and are perfectly capable of managing their lives, which includes making decisions about where and how they want to live.

It's best to avoid stereotypes and the assumption that aging itself renders us unable to make smart choices, or that older people cannot live full, rich lives. Bernard Baruch – an economic advisor to American Presidents for more than forty years and one of the architects of the Versailles treaty in 1919 – once remarked that, “I will never be an old man. Old age is always fifteen years older than I am.” Bernard Baruch lived that philosophy, and led a productive and happy life until his death in the mid-sixties at age ninety-five.

Your letter doesn't indicate that your father is having any problems. It just makes you sad that he is now living alone. The fact that he's “not getting any younger” is insufficient reason to take away the decision from him about where he will live. None of us are getting any younger. I know I'm not. How about you?!

How and where your father wants to live are important aspects of his quality of life, which is sufficient reason to let him do what he wants, if he is able. Since he's lived in that same house, neighborhood, and town for more than fifty years, it's also likely that he has friends and other social supports there, which he wouldn't necessarily have if he moved in with you.

Having personal control -- the ability to make choices and determine our lives and destiny -- is a critical aspect of living a happy and full life at any age. And it may be heartening for you to know that numerous scientific studies have clearly shown that older adults who have control over such things as where they live are not only happier, but also live longer than those who don't have this control.

Have an honest conversation with your dad. Tell him about your feelings and concerns about his living alone. Make sure he knows that if he should change his mind, he is always welcome to move in with you and your husband.

The mere act of talking about your sadness can open a door for a heartfelt conversation about how each of you feels about the death of your mother. Throughout the grieving process, talking about feelings is healing and good.

Then listen to what he has to say. He may tell you about the things that bring pleasure to his life. You may discover that his life is rich and full and that he volunteers for the Red Cross, has coffee with friends every Friday morning at a local restaurant, or loves to watch the birds in the local park. Listen with an open heart and mind so that you can better understand your father's reality now that your mother is gone.

Include your father in family events. Make frequent visits. After all, he's only an hour down the road. Let him know that you love him and that you respect his choices. Tell him that you're there for him through the rest of his life's journey.

*Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com), call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949*

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