



## **When and How to Coax Your Parent to Move Closer**

**If you're wondering whether a faraway mom or dad should relocate closer to you, these tips can help**

Eight years ago, my dad moved to a tiny town in New Mexico after nearly four decades in New York City. Then an active 73-year-old retiree, he yearned for a taste of mythic Southwest living, four acres and a dog.

But what seemed like an almost exotic locale when my husband and I first visited him ("Look, a tumbleweed!") is now a growing source of worry and expense for my family as well as for my brother and his wife.

There are no direct flights to my father's area from our homes in New York and Connecticut, so it's an 11-hour schlep. It costs about \$1,200 for my husband, son and me to fly there, so it's not like we can afford to just pop in whenever Dad needs us.

### **Can Dad Still Manage to Live By Himself?**

On top of that, my father is now 81 and moving more slowly. He's generally healthy, but when I visited him last fall, I was concerned about whether he could still take care of the house and yard and manage the two-hour drives to the nearest VA center for his medical checkups. (He's a Korean War veteran.)

My brother and I and our spouses have batted around the idea of moving Dad back East, but it's hard to persuade a guy who's (knock wood) still self-sufficient and happy where he is. Heck, he's producing a local play as we speak.

Apparently, however, we should try. And soon.

Jean Levin, executive director of [Caring From a Distance](#), a nonprofit in Washington, D.C., that connects caregivers with resources, says this is actually the ideal time to coax Dad closer – before there's an emergency.

If you wait until a crisis strikes, Levin says, you typically end up making choices in a panicked state (“You *have* to move in with us!”) that may not work out for anyone.

### **Our Family's Recent Scare**

We've had a taste of that. Last fall, Dad was hospitalized with abdominal pains that turned out to be related to old scar tissue. The discomfort quickly passed. But those 24 hours that my family and I were in emergency mode provoked a freight train of angst and impulsive “solutions” and drove home the strains of long-distance caregiving: the hastily booked flights, the need to schedule time off from work, lost sleep, phone calls to nearby assisted living centers and on and on.

And that was just one day. The estimated 7 million to 10 million caregivers who live an hour or more from their loved ones endure far worse — often for years at a time, according to [Howard Gleckman](#), author of [Caring for Our Parents](#). Long-distance caregivers are far more likely to [report mental and physical stress](#) than those who live with or near the people they're assisting.

Plus, the average annual cost of being a long-distance caregiver (never mind the value of time taken off from work) is staggering: nearly \$9,000. That's almost double the amount spent by caregivers who live close, according to the [AARP Public Policy Institute](#).

But if you're like me and want your parent at arm's reach, how do you decide if that's the best course for all involved? And how do you smooth the transition?

## What the Experts Recommend

Here are four tips from caregiving pros:

**1. Do a cost-benefit analysis of the move (one that's not wholly financial).** While long-distance caregiving can be expensive and stressful, in some cases, it might be wiser for your mom or dad not to relocate. The quality of medical care may be better where they are and their social life might be richer, compared with moving to a new area.

Levin recommends you do your analysis by making a special [reconnaissance trip](#) to suss out your parent's situation.

Don't try to ferret out the information in a [family discussion](#) during the hectic holidays. It's wiser to set up a visit specifically to assess things, like the medical care your parent is getting, how well your mom or dad is managing day to day and how many friends and neighbors there are, if you need their help in a pinch.

**2. Factor in the personal and economic cost to *you* of having a parent nearby.** Yes, you may spend less on travel after your mom or dad relocates, but you're likely to devote a lot more time assisting him or her. [Caregivers who live near their relatives](#) spend an average of almost 40 hours a week looking after them. That's like holding down a second job.

Moving your parent into an independent living facility, nursing home or assisted living facility in your area could become an enormous expense if you need to shoulder some of the costs.

Independent living facilities cost \$18,000 to \$42,000 a year, according to the website [A Place for Mom](#). The median annual rate for a private nursing home is \$83,850, says the [2013 Cost of Long Term Care survey](#) from Genworth Financial. For a one-bedroom unit in an assisted living facility, it's \$41,400.

There's also the alternative of [having your parent live with you](#), as people in their 50s and 60s are [doing increasingly](#). You'd avoid the costs a facility would charge, but would you and your family want to have [your mom or dad in the house](#)? Would your parent want to live with *you*?

**3. Consult with your family.** Obviously, you should discuss a prospective move with your spouse or partner and perhaps your kids. But be sure to loop in your siblings too, and try to get on the same page with them, Levin says.

This may be harder than it sounds. One of your parent's adult children may want to swoop in and make swift decisions, but the others might not share the same sense of urgency.

[Caring From a Distance](#) offers a free group conference call, moderated by one of its experts, to help families work through their options. Having a mediator can make it easier for you and your siblings to agree on ways to address such thorny matters as who'll pay for which costs or finding equitable ways to divvy up caretaking responsibilities.

**4. Learn about local resources.** Start with the Eldercare Locator, a free federal service that can put you in touch with providers of health care services, meals, transportation to doctor's appointments and the like. Call the Eldercare Locator's toll-free number, (800) 677-1116, or visit its [website](#).

The National Institute on Aging's free online booklet, [So Far Away: 20 Questions and Answers About Long Distance Caregiving](#), also has a guide to valuable resources.

### **What Our Family Is Doing About Dad**

I'd love to end this article on a proactive note and say that our family's troops are moving forward and we've made a plan!

But gearing up to help Dad move back East is harder than we thought. There's an unexpected sadness at the whole thought of it. Such a relocation would signal a new chapter in his life, but also an ending point that none of us wants to contemplate.

I grasp Levin's wise words about why you shouldn't wait for a crisis; I also understand why people do.

Meanwhile, I've begun talking to my family and my father about what the transition might look like ... some day.

You always get a few surprises by cracking open the channels of communication. Dad took me aback when he said he had already looked into living facilities for veterans.

So there's one more lesson for adult kids: Your (aging) parent might be a step or two ahead of you.

**By MP Dunleavy for Next Avenue**

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