

How Safe is Your Loved One's Home?

No matter where your senior relative lives – in his or her own house or apartment, in a senior housing community, or with you – being



safe at home is an important part of remaining as independent as possible.

According to the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC), falls are the leading cause of injury deaths in seniors, and are the most common cause of head trauma, hip fracture and other debilitating injuries.

There are some risk factors that we can't do much about: age, chronic health conditions and visual problems, for example.

But this fact may surprise you: of the 3 million seniors 65 and older who are involved in accidents, a majority were injured right in their own homes! And home hazards are a risk factor we can do something about.

Turn to page 2 to find out about steps you can take to improve the safety of your loved one's home. Then use the handy checklist on page 3 to conduct a quick home safety inspection!

Data: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Mom said What?

By Kari Berit

In the middle of a recent speech on communicating with our aging parents, a woman raised her hand.

"I'm 55 years old," she said, "and my mother still pushes my buttons. Before heading to work, I stopped at her house. When Mom answered the door, the first thing she said was, 'Are you wearing that to work?'"

Then this otherwise confident and competent woman went home and changed clothes.

Most of my audience laughed, but it wasn't all comfortable laughter. Hopefully, some of the older moms in the audience cringed, recalling a time they delivered such a greeting; maybe a few younger ones resolved not to do the same thing to their children.

Talking with Mom and Dad

As we are called upon to provide care, support and initiative in their lives, it's not uncommon to run smack into the wall of our past relationships. Remember how frustrated your parents could make you 30 years ago? Remember bickering over everything from clothes and hair styles to career and lifestyle choices? Is it time for the sequel?



Not necessarily.

The time to break the pattern and start a new one is as soon as you notice it. Think back. What kind of communication did you have with your parents when you were growing up? Did you listen to each other – without judgment? Or did everyone talk over each other? Learning to communicate is a skill.

Most of us listen "autobiographically" – we relate everything we hear to our own world. Try tuning in from your parent's side and listen "empathetically" instead. Use the skills you've learned in your own life, from work to family, to separate what's actually being said, however awkwardly, from how it's coming out. Then ignore the latter and engage the former.

Kari Berit (www.KariBerit.com) is the author of The Unexpected Caregiver: How Boomers Can Keep Mom & Dad Active, Safe and Independent (2007: Attainment Company). She helps seniors and their adult children create effective dialogue around things that matter.