

SeniorsLifestyleMag.com with Bart J. Mindszenty & Dr. Michael Gordon

How To Care For Aging Parents

Aging Parents? Care Giver For Seniors? Our Vulnerability Index Workbook Will Help You Understand The State Of Your Parents, Senior Patients, Or Other Elderly Loved One's Health, Mindset, and Behavior Right Now.

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

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How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

This is an inventory of the state of your parents' (or other elderly loved one's) health, mindset, and observed behavior right now. While this Vulnerability Index may seem to be difficult to complete because of the kinds of assessments you are being asked to make, please be objective and honest. Input answers based on what you know and what you can best assume. The end result is a profile of each of your parents (or other elderly loved ones) that will help you assess their current level of vulnerability.

Note: *Be aware this is a completely subjective assessment, but it should give you a broad, high-level indication of their vulnerability. It isn't scientific; it is, though, a helpful early warning guide for your use and to provide you with a likely sense of immediate and longer term challenges you and your parents may be facing.*



How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

How To Use This Workbook

Circle the **one best response** for each of the 27 following statements about each person you're assessing. Each response has a numeric value, ranging from six (in good shape) to zero (you don't know). Please circle the appropriate number opposite the response you select for each statement. Note that in some cases the same numeric value is given to more than one of the response options, and in some cases, the numeric choices aren't in sequential order. This is intentional, since some options merit the same value because of the implications, and some options offer more severe implications.

Your score will be explained at the end of this section.

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

| | Father | Mother |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| 1. Age: | | |
| 65–77 | 6 | 6 |
| 78–84 | 5 | 5 |
| 85–91 | 4 | 4 |
| 92–96 | 3 | 3 |
| 97+ | 2 | 2 |
| 2. Current Health: | Father | Mother |
| Good | 6 | 6 |
| Stable | 5 | 5 |
| Questionable | 4 | 4 |
| Eroding | 3 | 3 |
| Not good | 2 | 2 |
| Poor | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

3. To The Best Of My Knowledge, The Doctor Thinks My Parent:

| | Father | Mother |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Is doing well for this age | 6 | 6 |
| Has some minor problems | 5 | 5 |
| Has at least one major problem | 3 | 3 |
| Has very serious problems | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

4. Mentally/Cognitively My Parent Seems:

| | Father | Mother |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Sound/Astute | 6 | 6 |
| Gets confused now and then | 4 | 4 |
| Gets confused often | 2 | 2 |
| Very confused | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

5. Physically, My Parent Is:

| | Father | Mother |
|--|--------|--------|
| Independent and mobile | 6 | 6 |
| Relatively balanced and steady | 5 | 5 |
| Steady but at times unsure on different surfaces | 4 | 4 |
| Safer with a cane or walker | 3 | 3 |
| Restricted to using a walker | 2 | 2 |
| Very limited; uses a wheelchair | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

6. When Eating, My Parent:

| | Father | Mother |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Has a very good, consistent appetite | 6 | 6 |
| Eats a healthy balance of foods | 6 | 6 |
| Eats only what he or she likes/wants | 4 | 4 |
| Picks at the food, leaves a lot | 2 | 2 |
| Eats less than two full meals a day | 1 | 1 |
| There is food spoiling in the fridge | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

7. With Prescription Medication My Parent:

| | Father | Mother |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Is consistent and reliable | 6 | 6 |
| Sometimes forgets | 5 | 5 |
| Often forgets; needs reminders | 3 | 3 |
| Must be given pre-packaged doses | 2 | 2 |
| Must be administered medications | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

8. Socially My Parent Is Generally:

| | Father | Mother |
|---|--------|--------|
| Active, friendly, hospitable | 6 | 6 |
| Moderately active; welcomes at least some family/visitors | 5 | 5 |
| A bit passive; doesn't initiate communication | 4 | 4 |
| Passive; takes no initiatives to be social | 2 | 2 |
| Reclusive; withdrawn | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

9. With Each Other My Parents Are:

| | Father | Mother |
|---|--------|--------|
| Supportive; gentle, patient, helpful | 6 | 6 |
| Moderately supportive; try to help to the best of his/her ability | 5 | 5 |
| Not very supportive; impatient, critical, anxious | 4 | 4 |
| Passive; takes no initiatives, indifferent | 3 | 3 |
| Unsupportive; refuses to help, impatient | 2 | 2 |
| Verbally and/or physically aggressive | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

10. With Me My Parent is:

| | Father | Mother |
|--|--------|--------|
| Very pleasant, comfortable, honest, open | 6 | 6 |
| Somewhat pleasant, comfortable, honest, open | 5 | 5 |
| Not very pleasant, comfortable, honest, open | 3 | 3 |
| Somewhat restless, withdrawn | 2 | 2 |
| Very restless, agitated, non-communicative | 1 | 1 |
| Verbally and/or physically aggressive | 0 | 0 |

11. With My Spouse My Parent is:

| | Father | Mother |
|---|--------|--------|
| Very comfortable/engaged; communicates openly | 6 | 6 |
| Somewhat comfortable; smiles, welcoming | 5 | 5 |
| Not very comfortable; remote, withdrawn | 4 | 4 |
| Somewhat restless; withdrawn | 3 | 3 |
| Very restless, agitated, non-communicative | 2 | 2 |
| Verbally and/or physically aggressive | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

12. With My Children My Parent is:

| | Father | Mother |
|--|--------|--------|
| Kind, caring smiles, involved, communicative | 6 | 6 |
| Less involved; restrained, few communications | 4 | 4 |
| Mostly flat; uninvolved, closed, non-communicative | 2 | 2 |
| Totally uninvolved; closed, non-communicative | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

13. With Other Immediate Family My Parent is:

| | Father | Mother |
|---|--------|--------|
| Very comfortable, engaged, communicative | 6 | 6 |
| Somewhat comfortable; smiles, restrained, minimal communication | 5 | 5 |
| Not very comfortable; quiet, remote/withdrawn | 4 | 4 |
| Somewhat impatient; distant, uninterested | 3 | 3 |
| Very restless; closed, refusing contact | 2 | 2 |
| Verbally and/or physically aggressive | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

14. My Family Would Characterize My Parent As:

| | Father | Mother |
|---|--------|--------|
| Nice to be with most of the time | 6 | 6 |
| Nice to be with for shorter periods of time | 4 | 4 |
| Tolerable to be with occasionally | 2 | 2 |
| Unpleasant to be with | 1 | 1 |

15. Usually In Appearance My Parent Generally:

| | Father | Mother |
|--|--------|--------|
| Is neatly groomed | 6 | 6 |
| Wears clean but mismatched clothes; unshaven | 5 | 5 |
| Wears the same clothes for multiple days | 3 | 3 |
| Is regularly disheveled; refuses to bathe, doesn't comb hair; sleeps in day clothing | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

16. My Parent Participates In Group Activities and/or Hobbies Such As Curling, Playing Cards, Knitting, Building Model Cars, Photography, etc.:

| | Father | Mother |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Frequently | 6 | 6 |
| Regularly | 6 | 6 |
| Occasionally | 4 | 4 |
| Never | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

17. My Parent Has:

| | Father | Mother |
|---|--------|--------|
| Regular contact with at least a few friends | 6 | 6 |
| Regular contact with one friend | 5 | 5 |
| Infrequent contact with a few friends | 3 | 3 |
| No regular contact with friends | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

18. My Parent Gets Out Of The Home:

| | Father | Mother |
|--------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Frequently; two or more times a week | 6 | 6 |
| From time to time; once a week | 4 | 4 |
| Infrequently; once or twice a month | 2 | 2 |
| Rarely; only on special occasions | 2 | 2 |
| Never | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

19. My Parent Drives A Car:

| | Father | Mother |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| All the time (or does not drive) | 6 | 6 |
| At least once or twice a week | 5 | 5 |
| At least two/three times a month | 2 | 2 |
| License suspended recently | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

20. When Driving My Parent:

| | Father | Mother |
|---|--------|--------|
| Drives safely; observes all rules of the road | 6 | 6 |
| Occasionally gets lost | 4 | 4 |
| Frequently gets lost | 2 | 2 |
| Often loses car in parking lot; misplaces keys | 2 | 2 |
| Drives unsafely, erratically; has minor accidents | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

21. Concerning Alcoholic Beverages, My Parent:

| | Father | Mother |
|---|--------|--------|
| Never drinks | 6 | 6 |
| Tolerates drinking consistent with past use | 5 | 5 |
| Is drinking more than usual | 3 | 3 |
| Loses track of the amount consumed | 2 | 2 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

22. My Parent's Handling Of Money Matters Seem:

| | Father | Mother |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Responsible | 6 | 6 |
| Inconsistent but still reasonable | 5 | 5 |
| Erratic; impulsive | 3 | 3 |
| Irresponsible; unreasonable | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

23. With Regard To Charitable Solicitations My Parent:

| | Father | Mother |
|--|--------|--------|
| Donates in keeping with past habits and considers new requests carefully | 6 | 6 |
| Loses track of donations made | 4 | 4 |
| Has made recent uncharacteristic donations | 2 | 2 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

24. My Parent Has:

| | Father | Mother |
|---|--------|--------|
| A current will | 6 | 6 |
| A will written/updated in the past five years | 5 | 5 |
| A will written more than five years ago | 3 | 3 |
| No will | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

25. My Parent Has A Living Will:

| | Father | Mother |
|--|--------|--------|
| That is current | 6 | 6 |
| Written or updated in the past three years | 5 | 5 |
| Written more than three years ago | 3 | 3 |
| Does not have a living will | 1 | 1 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

26. My Parent Has Given Power Of Attorney For Property And Money To:

| | Father | Mother |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Me or my sibling | 6 | 6 |
| Another person | 5 | 5 |
| My other parent | 4 | 4 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

27. My Parent Has Given Legal Authority For Personal And Health Care Decisions To:

| | Father | Mother |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Me or my sibling | 6 | 6 |
| Another person | 5 | 5 |
| My other parent | 3 | 3 |
| I don't know, but need to find out | 0 | 0 |

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

162 to 108 Points

If **both** of your parents scored in this range, then it would seem that right now each one is fairly stable. They appear to be relatively independent and operating safely on their own. This is actually an excellent time to start having a series of sincere and serious conversations with them, together and separately, to understand their wishes going forward and plan on how to ensure the best possible quality of life for them.

Specific actions to consider:

- Ask if they'll work with you to plan for their future wishes and needs
- Talk with siblings and other close family members about what care issues may arise and how you could manage them together
- Find ways to keep your parents mentally and physically active; look for and help them engage in activities they would like to do on a regular basis
- If you're not already doing it, start calling and/or seeing them more regularly so you'll know firsthand how they're doing

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

107 to 81 Points

If **either** of your parents scored in this range, there would seem to be a definite trend toward changes beginning to happen or likely looming on the horizon. Your parent is becoming more vulnerable, and the potential for negative experiences is growing. Now is an important time to take a closer look at his or her capabilities and needs, and start planning for what kind of added assistance will be needed.

Specific actions to consider:

- Start keeping a closer watch on your parent's lifestyle, activities, and perceived health. Pay attention to their physical and cognitive capabilities
- Ask more frequently and probe gently but more deeply about how they feel in general, what they're most often thinking about in terms of their health and lifestyle
- Introduce the importance of planning ahead while they are well, so that their interests can be protected and their wishes respected
- Keep them as socially, mentally, and physically active as possible

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

80 Points Or Less

If **either** of your parents scored in this range, you may well be on the brink of, or already in, a critical period in his or her advancing years. **Now is the time to act** promptly and decisively. Get sound medical advice and work at planning for next steps in securing added support for her or him, or both of them. The key point here is that *failure to act* could endanger your parents' wellbeing.

Specific actions to consider:

- Find a way to accompany your parents for an appointment with their family physician and get to know the doctor
- See how you can get a geriatrician involved with assessing and examining them on a regular basis
- Gently and respectfully enlist their cooperation in building a list of their important documentation: pension, insurance and health plans, banking, etc.
- If not already in hand, ask for powers of attorney for health and general issues
- If they're still driving a car, determine whether they can do so safely

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

Seven Or More Zeros

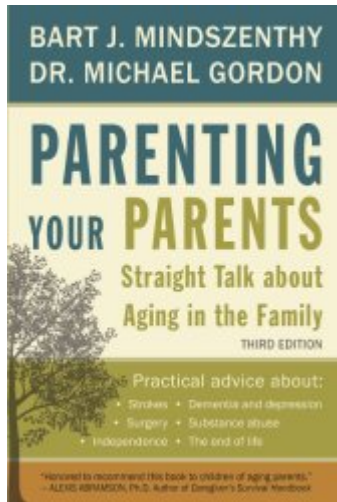
If you scored seven zeros or more for either person, then you are probably out of touch with him or her. So now is the time to take a deep look inside and determine your willingness to help them and be more actively supportive, or at least help drive a process that will provide them with the safeguards and help they need or will soon need. You may wish to enlist the active support of siblings, other family members, or outside services. But please **take action now**.

Specific actions to consider:

- Identify a family member close to your parents who is willing to take the lead role in protecting their overall wellbeing
- Think through, and make it clear to all those engaged in your parents' wellbeing, precisely what you can or are willing to do to support them, and also what you cannot or are not willing to do, so that you are engaged only as appropriate
- Or, decide to get more active and engaged, and if you do, then please complete this Vulnerability Index assessment again and see if what you've done and learned will give a more accurate score and provide you with a better knowledge of your parents needs

How To Care For Aging Parents: The Vulnerability Index

Get The Book: **Parenting Your Parents**



Since the last edition in 2006, much has happened in the field of eldercare. There is now an increasing awareness of the complex challenges posed by the expanding aging population in North America. When our parents reach a certain age and have difficulty coping, we find ourselves wondering how to provide them with the kind of love, care, support, and attention they need, just as they have done for us all our lives.

The third edition of *Parenting Your Parents* shows, through 24 case studies and the personal experiences of the authors, that you are not alone and offers crucial advice to help you along this difficult but rewarding journey. It also offers this Vulnerability Index to measure what level of need your parents may have right now, as well as a financial planning section and resource directory.

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About The Authors

Bart J. Mindszenty, APR, FCPRS, LM, has been a family caregiver and eldercare advocate since 2002 with five books on the subject, including *The Family Eldercare Workbook Planner*. He is also a partner in a communications and training firm operating in Canada and the U.S. He lives in Toronto.

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