

# Should You Let Your Mother-in-Law Move In?

by [Sheryl Nance-Nash](#)

When your husband asks if his aging mother can move in, what do you do? For many midlife couples, discussing elder care can be a tricky situation, and conversations like this can really put the pressure on a relationship. "It can become such a big issue that the marriage is compromised forever. No couple should head into this situation without both parties agreeing it makes sense and they are on board," says Leslie Sokol, PhD., director of Education at the Beck Institute of Cognitive Therapy.



So when the question is proposed, how do you react? Here are a few tips on how to get a positive conversation started.

**Take a deep breath.** Don't freak out. Don't give an immediate response. Ask your husband if you can think on it a bit and then schedule a time to sit down and discuss it. In preparation for that talk, both of you should write the pros and cons separately and be ready to negotiate like a business meeting, without the emotion, says Leslie Seppinni, a doctor of clinical psychology and licensed marriage family therapist.

**Ask tough questions.** There are a few questions that will need to be addressed. Marion Somers, Ph.D. and author, *Elder Care Made Easier*, offers just a few of them. Is this the best choice for your family, your marriage, and his mother? Is this something she has requested, or was this his idea? Who will shoulder the bulk of the responsibility for her care? Will this be a partnership or left primarily for you? Can the care she needs be coordinated in her home environment first? Is she coming temporarily, permanently? Will having her in the house offset childcare costs or how otherwise might the family benefit? What are the medical issues? Will this be a financial hardship in terms of food, medical care, upgrade to the home?

**Listen carefully.** When you do have that discussion, let your husband talk about his fears and concerns. There can be unexpected rewards from communicating honestly and letting him have his say, says Ken Dychtwald, a psychologist and gerontologist. Look for clues for how your spouse really feels about this. Does he genuinely want her to come, is it merely a sense of obligation, or what?

It shouldn't only be your ears that are open though. Speak up about what concerns you. Women have a great deal at stake in this issue. **Historically, women have been at the center of the family dynamics when it comes to family long term care scenarios and care giving, says Dychtwald.** And most are doing that while juggling careers. Approximately two-thirds of all caregivers are women. To further complicate matters, 40 percent of eldercare-givers have children of their own under the age of 18 living at home. Present your case, honestly, gently, calmly. "Rather than demanding that his mother not come, let him know how much you are against it and why. Don't give ultimatums you don't plan to back up, or you will simply be creating barriers in your relationship and starting a pattern of mistrust. If you're unwilling to give it a try, offer alternatives, and if necessary, accept the consequences," says Sokol.

**Agree but stand firm.** If you decide to go ahead, by all means stipulations and ground rules are in order and should be agreed upon. The husband is key in determining if this will be a win-win for all, says Carol Kryder, a clinical psychologist and family therapist. "He needs to be able to set limits with mom, and not let her have a sense of entitlement. There needs to be cooperation and consideration for everyone else's feelings," says Kryder. Remember, it's your home, you two are in charge.

**Expect the best.** Since conventional wisdom is that each of us has a 90 percent chance of someday caring for our aging parents, grandparents or other loved ones, be ready for the reality that one day you're likely going to tackle the issue with your husband.

Truth is, sometimes, the highly anticipated situation turns out to be an unexpected blessing. Younger children often find they like having grandma around, versus a fear that she would become the center of attention. Mother and daughter-in-law sometimes discover that each other isn't so bad after all. The brownie points you earn could take your relationship to a new level and hubby will feel like a hero.

Kate and Doug Bandos moved in his widowed, ailing, 92-year-old mother, they have no regrets and neither do their children, who enjoyed spending what would be grandma's last days together. "We set up a hospital bed in the living room near a glass sliding door so she could still see outside. We got window bird feeders so she could watch the birds. We really got to know her, especially over the last year. I know Doug would do the same for me."

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