

Mother-daughter road map

BY SUSAN REIMER

They say that the work of a parent is never done. It just changes.

It is a truism that carries a lot of baggage for those of us who came of age in the era of professional motherhood, when their report card might as well have been our report card. When we were only as happy as our most unhappy child.

Now those children are young adults, and those hyper-involved chickens have come home to roost, especially in the always-fraught relationship between mothers and daughters.

In the new book "Too Close for Comfort?" authors Linda Perlman Gordon and Susan Morris Shaffer make the case for a healthy disengagement. And it is the mothers (isn't it always the mothers?) who need to leave the room.

"There are consequences to being your daughter's personal concierge," Shaffer said.

And it isn't just that she won't learn how to make her own airline reservations. Mothers who continue to be the fixer and the rescuer deny their daughters the chance to become independent, to become competent.

Gordon is a family therapist in Washington and has learned much from her patients. Shaffer is executive director of the Maryland State Parental Information Resource Center. Both have adult daughters in their 30s, and they know this territory well.

The boundaries between mothers and daughters have shifted, they say. At no time in recent history has one generation had so much in common with the next. College educations, workplace experience. You can probably add music, fashion, politics and multiple sex partners, too.

We think we can guide our daughters through these thickets, if only they would listen to us. We are probably right, but Shaffer and Gordon argue that they need to find their own way.

"We don't want to give up our mother-daughter relationships with our adult daughters because they are such a source of comfort," said Shaffer.

Dinner out, a movie, shoe shopping, cooking together or traveling. BFFs.

"But at some point you want them to start giving back. To ask how your day was, to

It is possible our daughters will not like it when we withdraw the safety net, if we are not at their beck and call.

stop expecting to be the center of the universe," said Shaffer. "And that requires a different kind of parenting."

A kind of parenting that will produce its own kind of friction. It is possible our daughters will not like it when we withdraw the safety net, if we are not at their beck and call.

"They will define themselves by bumping up against us," said Gordon.

Their book defines a variety of mother-daughter relationship types. And there is a kind of work sheet that will help women think about their role as mother. Plus some strategies that will help mothers establish healthy boundaries and ground rules with daughters who have reaped the rewards, as well as the handicaps, of our kind of mothering.

This isn't likely to be a problem with our sons, the authors allow. Boys do not see their mothers as anything but mothers — never as friends or as role models or as their future selves.

Our daughters, on the other hand, are waiting longer to marry and commit to a family of their own, and that means they are spending more time as our daughters. The poor economy and stagnant wages don't help them move toward independence, either.

"We didn't have that time to cultivate a relationship with our own mothers," said Shaffer. "We have time to work on this one."

Just because we are not screaming at each other over the pill or Nixon doesn't mean we are at the same stage in life. Just because we both like ballet flats doesn't mean we are equals. Just because we can hang out for an afternoon without someone storming out and slamming a door doesn't mean that we are friends.

So, what are we?

"We are all living longer," said Gordon. "You might have 50 healthy years together. You better figure it out."

Susan Reimer writes for The Baltimore Sun. E-mail her at susan.reimer@baltsun.com.

READERS FORUM

Healthy aging: Tell us what helps

BY GLENDA ARMSTRONG



HEALTHY AGING

Glenda Armstrong: It does help, however, to ask about our goals, needs and preferences. It does help to discuss the barriers we identify, and it does help to receive information that is relevant to our particular situation.

A fellow nurse and co-worker announced the other day that September is Healthy Aging Month. She knew I just turned 55 and figured I'd better start paying attention to monthly observances that focus on the silver set.

In spite of the fact that I had spent the last 25 years working with older adults, I had never heard of this one, so I Googled. I learned Healthy Aging Month was created by the Educational Television Network more than 15 years ago to promote the positive aspects of aging.

According to Carolyn Worthington, president of Educational Television Network, Inc., "We see a need to draw attention to the 'myths' of aging, to shout out, 'Hey, it's not too late to take control of your health.'"

The Web site is full of information on healthy diet and lifestyle choices to help us do just that. In fact, there is information all over the place to help us live lean and mean.

You'd had to have lived on Venus for the last 20 years not to know daily inhalation of cheeseburgers and fries clogs up your arteries, raises your blood pressure and eventually makes you fat. We know we should eat more fruits, veggies and whole grains. We know we should quit smoking. We also know that exercise is good for us on soooooo many levels.

We know all of these things but for some strange reason, collectively, we are getting heavier, sicker and less able to lift our tushies off the couch.

I have found that scolding and berating aren't particularly motivating for me or anyone else. Most people, including older adults, want to take control and make healthy choices but are often frustrated by unique challenges. Many times, for example, the meals on a prescribed diet plan do not take into account a person's culture or food preferences. Exercising in water may be great when you have arthritis in your hips and knees, but what if you don't drive and the nearest pool is 40 miles away? It is hard to take control when the information and the choices don't make sense in real life.

Not surprisingly, studies on this subject show that when health care providers shift the focus to discovering what works and

doesn't work for the individual, outcomes are much better.

This approach is called person-centered and it recognizes that each of us is in control of our own lives and we deserve applicable information to make informed choices.

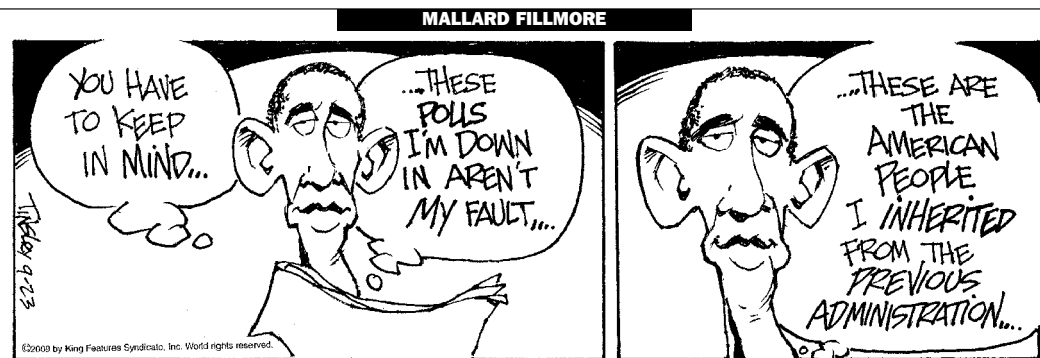
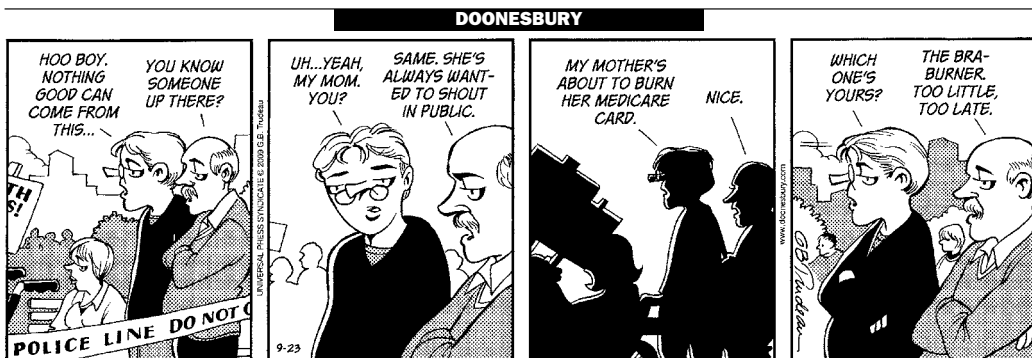
Here is a personal example. Several years ago, I told a doctor I wanted to quit smoking but I had tried and failed many times. He gave me a stern look and shouted, "Don't you know smoking will kill you?" (Geez, I guessed I missed that one.)

Last year, I brought it up again, with my current doc. She didn't judge or shame me. Instead, she praised my attempts, asked about my concerns and about what helped and what didn't. She helped me find the tools and supports that fit my life. She helped me take control.

So as I think about Healthy Aging Month, I'm thinking about what really does and doesn't help me or the older adults I work with take control of our health. It doesn't help to hear what we and the rest of the world already know, it doesn't help to use patronizing clichés that start with "You are never too old to..." and it really doesn't help to get exercise handouts that have a photo of a young lithe woman twisted like pretzel into a yoga position that my artificial knee will never allow me to do.

It does help, however, to ask about our goals, needs and preferences. It does help to discuss the barriers we identify, and it does help to receive information that is relevant to our particular situation. That's what truly helps, at any age, all 12 months of the year.

Glenda Armstrong is clinical manager, program development with the Long Term Care Management Authority in Tulsa.



Free Oscar® Winning Movie.

Call to get this 2008 Academy Award® Winning Film For FREE!

FREE DVD

You'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll never forget this heartwarming – and true – story of a brave little girl who suffered for 6 long years waiting for a 45-minute surgery that would change her life.

Call 866-582-7559 Or Order NOW at www.smilepinkie.org

SmileTrain
Changing The World One Smile At A Time.

The Smile Train is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit recognized by the IRS, and all donations to The Smile Train are tax-deductible in accordance with IRS regulations. © 2009 The Smile Train. Academy Awards® and Oscar® are the registered trademarks and service marks of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

DEXTER

Get Cox Digital Cable with Showtime for \$69.95 per month for 6 months.

Call 286-4100 to order today!

Offer expires 10/25/09. Regular rates apply after 6 consecutive months. Available only to current residential Cox customers who are new Cox Digital Cable customers in participating Cox service areas. Cox Limited Basic (at a minimum), digital receiver or CableCARD rental, and Digital Gateway required. If you own a One-way Digital Cable Ready (DCR) TV or other display device that is CableCARD™-compatible, you may lease either a CableCARD or a digital set top receiver in order to receive Cox Digital Cable. In order to receive Interactive TV services offered by Cox, such as the Interactive Programming Guide (IPG), OnDemand, Pay-Per-View, and all digital programming options, you must rent a digital receiver. If you wish to rent a CableCARD in lieu of a digital receiver, you must obtain the CableCARD from Cox. On DEMAND available to Cox Digital Cable customers and requires Cox Digital Cable, digital receiver and remote rental. Some On DEMAND programming may be extra. On DEMAND programming cannot be recorded. Televisions and other consumer owned devices equipped with a CableCARD may require a digital set top receiver to receive all programming options offered by Cox Digital Cable. Programming may vary. Installation fees, taxes, franchise fees, and other surcharges are additional. Other restrictions may apply. CableCARD is a registered trademark of Cable Television Laboratories, Inc. (CableLabs®) and is used with permission. ©2009 Cox Communications, Inc. All rights reserved. SHOWTIME and related marks are trademarks of Showtime Networks Inc., a CBS company. You must be a SHOWTIME subscriber to receive Showtime On Demand. "Dexter™" & "Californication™" are trademarks of Showtime Networks Inc. All rights reserved. "Inside The NFL™": ©NFL Productions LLC. All NFL-related names, marks, and logos are trademarks of the National Football League. All rights reserved.