

# Warning Signs of Dementia or Mental Illness

Everyone has unique traits in their personality. As your parent ages, these unique traits may grow stronger. You may eventually recognize that they have behavioral or social problems that need attention. Dementia may be at the core of these problems, but it may be masked by many other symptoms. No one is immune to memory lapses, moments of confusion, or misunderstandings. But there are some types of mental behavior that stand out and tell you it's time to do something. Some of these signs are:

- Your parent has stopped wanting to learn new things, such as how to use a computer, microwave, or VCR.
- Your parent complains that they are overdrawn at the bank and they suspect the bank is stealing their money.
- You come home to find your answering machine has a multitude of messages from your parent. It's obvious that each time your parent called, they forgot about the previous message.
- Your parent starts to tell your family members stories that are untrue. Or they "enhance" stories with a reality that differs from yours.
- Your parent repeatedly asks the same question, even though you've already given them the answer.
- Your parent complains about a neighbor and claims the neighbor is staring into their house or watching them. Or your parent is afraid of a neighbor for no good reason.
- Your parent's mood swings are out of control and they cry and laugh several times within an hour's time.
- You find that your parent's important bills have been paid more than once, or not at all.
- Your parent puts words in a sentence that don't belong, making the sentence difficult to understand.
- Your parent can't remember the names of your children, and makes attempts to cover it up. Or maybe your parent calls you or one of your family by another relative's name, and repeats this action again and again.
- You visit your parent's home and discover there are reminders all over the house. Some of them make no sense.
- Your parent continually buys more of what is already in the refrigerator because they forgot they already bought the items.
- The calendar has every day checked off and notes as to what happened on that day.
- Your parent has lost complete interest in a hobby or activity.
- When out for a walk with your parent, they rely on you to take the lead on the way back, as if they can't remember the way.
- You come to visit at supper time and they forget something cooking on the stove until you both smell it burning.
- Your parent can no longer even attempt to balance their checkbook.
- Your parent loses things and you eventually find them in ridiculous places.

If you've checked more than four of the symptoms above, you may want to get your parent to a doctor for an evaluation as soon as possible. Make sure you complete all of the legal preparations in Chapter 3, while your parent is still cognizant and coherent.