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Panic and Mobility Awareness

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During a seminar I was conducting, a number of frustrated attendees approached me at the break. They were recently thrust into what we call "mobility awareness" through an accident their daughter was in. They recently moved into the city from rural life and had no idea where to turn or go for advice as to how they can give their child more mobility in their own home. This changed the course of the seminar for the rest of the day. After the break, we addressed the issue of "where to get needed information" or "how can you, as parents or loved ones, adapt a home, if needed, in a timely fashion?"

The first thing that must be done in situations like this is to put the emotional shock of the accident, stroke, or event into perspective. If you allow it to grow, it will eat you alive and you will not be able to help yourself, much less the person who you intend to help. That is exactly what happened in this particular case.

Information was offered to these people from the hospital, social workers, and support group; but that did not sink in. Because of that, when their daughter was ready to come home, the home was not ready for her. The parents were overwhelmed, thinking the house needed major alterations just to get their daughter from room to room. It didn't dawn on them that they were not the only ones in that situation. I put it to the rest of the seminar attendees and found that over 48% of the group started out in the same panic stricken manner. We then got down to it and the group put together ways that they had worked themselves out of this rut.

The first and foremost step was to stop, gather composure, take a deep breath, and take a symbolic first step forward. From there, you begin...

Contact your local doctor, hospital, and organization involved with your particular situation. Request as much information brochures, and phone numbers as possible in regard to social agencies, guide and support groups and learn if funding is available to assist you in meeting your needs. Most agencies will send out case workers to help you through the process needed to aid your particular situation.

You must also understand that there are things you can do yourself. In many cases, a box of simple household hand tools will become your best friend. For example, let's look at door width. Measure the wheel chair from its widest points. Go through your home and do the same to each needed doorway at the narrowest points. You may find in some cases that merely cutting the door stops up to the height of the door knobs may give you the inch or so you need. If that isn't enough, special offset hinges are available. An average door set at a 90 degree opening to its frame, takes up approximately 2" to 2 1/2" of the opening. The offset hinges work similar to hinges on the back of a van. They take the door completely out of the opening, offering you that extra room.

In the case of storm or combination doors, many times the door closer is in the way. Merely taking the closer's cylinder off every time the opening is needed will not do, because the closer's jamb mount sticks out approximately 3". The closer should be moved. It can be placed at the top of the door, or in some cases, a mid-door push bar can be installed to mount the closer on. This should raise the closer cylinder and mounting bracket over the chaired person's shoulders and still allow the closer to function at near the height it is needed.

Door knobs can be changed to lever type knobs, in many cases, by the use of a simple screwdriver or two. The same can be done to light switches. The standard flip switch can be changed to larger push toggles that can be worked even with elbows.

In the bath, there are safety grab bars available that clamp to the tub or mount to the same screws the toilet seat uses. Wall mounted safety grab bars must be secured to studding within the wall. Many times, this is where the frustration starts, especially if the walls are ceramic and the location of the studs is difficult to find. There are electronic stud sensors available in most handy stores; however, they are not always completely accurate.

Here is where a professional may come in handy. When the need of a professional is at hand, know how to reach the right person for the job. Many times a simple "Mr. Fixit" or carpenter may make matters worse instead of better if they are not familiar with mobility needs.

To seek out a professional experienced with ADA or mobility adaptations, ask other people in similar situations who they used. Call local trade organizations, like NARI (the National Association of the Remodeling Industry). They can get you in contact with the local chapter nearest you if you cannot find them yourself. Explain your situation and your needs. They should be able to assist you with the names of firms that are familiar with your needs.

Once you get your list of names, contact the firms, asking the usual screening questions. Then, going beyond that, seek out the firms that have "personal" experiences for being in the mobility field. You will find that if a business has a loved one, employee, or family member that is in a similar situation, you may get better service, quicker attention, and, at the very least, understanding. This understanding and past experience can go a long way in regard to the proper advice on ADA hardware which is good or not so good for your particular situation, or in some case where to go for financial aid to assist you with your adaptation needs. They should also be familiar with local codes that may govern your special needs, whereas a "Mr. Fixit" or basic carpenter may not.

Just remember; not everything needed is major and panic only serves the greedy out there waiting to take advantage of the situation thrust upon you. Keep a clear head, take things one step at a time, and ask the right questions. You will find that things do go easier as time moves on.

We hope this information has been helpful to you! If you have any further questions, please visit our website at www.aroundyourhouse.net, or contact Jim at Around Your House.

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