



Area Agency on Aging, PSA 2

Caregiving Series

LONG DISTANCE CAREGIVING

*When I went back home to care for mother after her last surgery,
I was surprised to see how very frail she had become.*

In today's mobile society, adult children may live several hundred miles from their parents and may be unaware there are unmet needs until a crisis occurs. Most family members do care and want to help, but realize they cannot travel back and forth to give day-to-day care. However, with planning and adequate support, family members can be involved, no matter how far away their loved one lives.

IDENTIFY NEEDS

Make the most of your visits and find out what your loved ones need. Observe, ask questions, and make planning a team effort. Are your loved ones able to do household chores, shop, and prepare meals? Can they drive or is transportation available? How are they getting to the doctor? Can they bathe and dress themselves, take care of money matters, and manage paperwork? Have they kept up their social contacts and spiritual connections?

Is the home safe, or are there hazards that could cause falls or fire? Would a medical alert system, or roll-in shower be helpful? Once you have reached a consensus on needs, you will need to identify sources of help. Respect your loved ones' feelings about needing care, having strangers in their home, and giving up some of their independence. Intervene only as much as necessary, and do not take away any activities they can still do and enjoy, even if you do not fully agree with their decisions.

DEVELOP AN INFORMAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

Identify the informal support system already in place. Most people have friends, neighbors, fellow club members, or others who are already helping them. Reach out to other family members for help. If they haven't been involved, schedule a family meeting or set up a phone or e-mail conference to let them know what you can do and how they can help.

Meet individually with helpers and be specific about exactly what each will do. Make a list of names, addresses, phone numbers, and when helpers can be reached. Give house keys to one or more helpers your loved ones trust. Let them know they can call you collect any time of day or night and be sure you have a working answering machine. Contact helpers regularly and thank them for their support.

LOCATE FORMAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Gather information about services and programs in the community where your loved one lives. Call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116, or go to www.eldercare.gov, the website sponsored by the U.S. Administration on Aging for information about services and programs anywhere in the country. Friends and neighbors are also a good source of information about services they have used.

Plan to spend a day or two securing information and setting up services. Let service providers know when you will be available and find out what information you need before you meet with them. Keep a record of all agencies involved with your loved ones, the names of contact persons, and how to reach them. Stay in touch.

Make a list of all medical, legal, and financial professionals involved. Introduce yourself and let them know you are involved with providing care. Be sure you know how to reach each other at all times.

BE REALISTIC

Caregiving from a distance can be very stressful. You may experience guilt or frustration at not being able to do more. Be realistic and give yourself credit for what you can do. Frequent travel, additional expense, and conflicts with work and family life can be exhausting. If your past relationship was poor, helping your loved one now will not be an easy task. You will need to decide how extensively you can be involved.

You may want to consider hiring a geriatric care manager who can oversee all aspects of care. Geriatric care managers are health and human service professionals such as a nurse, social worker, or psychologist with special focus on elder care. They will meet with you to develop a plan of care and to identify resources. The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers has a directory of care managers on their website, www.caremanager.org.



*For more information or a list of titles in this series,
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