

Disability Campaign.org

How to Choose a Caregiver



Everyone needs help. And when it comes to having a disability, having help can make a significant difference in the quality of life and the day-to-day needs of a person. If you or a loved one have a disability, you may have considered obtaining a caregiver — a person who can help at home with personal care routines, drive you to doctor’s appointments, or provide company to an aging parent. Not to mention, having an extra pair of hands could allow you to work or provide you with some much-needed time to rest. But how do you know what qualities to look for in a caregiver? What factors should you consider in hiring or asking someone to assist you? In this resource sheet, we hope to provide you with some practical tips on how to choose a caregiver to help meet your needs or those of your loved one affected by a disability.

Determining your caregiving needs

1. **Make a list of your caregiving needs.** Do you require help with morning routines? Do you need someone to prepare meals? How often will you be needing this person?



These are questions that you need to ask yourself as you put together a list of your caregiving needs. Be as specific as possible. For example, when you consider your morning routine, does this involve bed baths, dressing, grooming, etc.?

2. **With your list before you, consider the type of help you need.** Will this be someone who will help occasionally or is this a full-time commitment? Can you find someone to voluntarily help or will you be hiring a caregiver? Does the person need a medical or health background (i.e. are you needing a home health aide or certified nursing assistant) or experience working with children with special needs? If you're unsure, ask your doctor, social care worker, or a friend or relative for advice. By narrowing the type of help you need, you'll be more efficient when searching for a caregiver and will increase the likelihood of finding a good "fit."

3. **Create a "job description."** Even if you are only looking for someone to help you from time to time, it's best to put together a job description that includes the:

- type of disability
- extent of the disability (e.g., the range of motion, degree of vision loss, intellectual challenges, social skills, ability to follow rules, etc.)
- skills needed (e.g. language, driving, cooking, CPR certification, etc.)
- duties or responsibilities
- time commitment
- compensation (if applicable)



Searching for a caregiver

- 1. Consider volunteers.** Think about people who will voluntarily assist you or your loved one, especially if you will only need help upon occasion. Perhaps this is someone at your church or place of worship, a family friend, a coworker who can help on the weekend, or a neighbor who you can call on if you're in a pinch. If you do not know the person well enough, contact references and run a background check.
- 2. Consider using a caregiving agency.** The benefits of using an elderly care or at-home-aid agency is that they can vet applicants for you, handle training, and even manage the payroll. Just note that many agencies charge fees for this type of service. Still, using a caregiving agency can make finding a caregiver a smoother and safer process for you and your family.
- 3. Post the job.** Try online job websites, social media, church bulletins, university employment sites for students, or libraries. Be creative and spread the word. While you may not know of anyone who is looking for a caregiving job, a neighbor or friend might have the perfect person in mind.
- 4. Vet the applicants.** Run a background check, contact references, and assess the applicant's skills to ensure that they can safely and adequately care for you or your loved one. Remember that hiring a caregiver means placing you or your loved one's health in the care of someone else. And if that person will have access to your home, you want to make sure you also consider the wellbeing and safety of other household members.



Qualities of a good caregiver

While most of us can be helpful, not everyone is a good fit for a caregiving job. As you consider which applicants to interview, look for someone who is:



- Patient
- A good communicator
- Responsible
- Flexible
- Willing to be trained
- Self-motivated
- Experienced with disability
- Kind
- Compassionate
- Thinks of safety first
- Has a good sense of humor
- Can respond quickly and safely in an emergency

Interview questions

Once you've narrowed down prospective caregivers, you'll want to get to know them more personally. But unless you've been in a managerial position, you may not have experience "interviewing" people. While this doesn't have to be a formal interview as it would be with a job, here are some questions that you can ask a candidate to determine if he or she is a good fit for your caregiving needs.

- Do you have experience interacting with people with disabilities? (If applicable: With the elderly? With children?)
- For how long have you worked or volunteered in a caregiving position??
- Do you have any specialized training? (e.g., Are you CPR certified? Do you have a certificate or degree in special education or childcare?)

- Why do you like caregiving? Or, what about this job is appealing to you?
- Are you willing and able to perform the duties on the job description?
- Do the hours I listed fit your schedule?
- Is this something that you can commit to long-term or only for a season (summer break, for example)?
- Do you have any questions for me?

An in-person interview is best. Please note that while you want to make sure the person will feel comfortable in your home and with your disabled relative, we recommend that the initial interview be conducted elsewhere. Once you feel this person is right for the job, invite them for a second interview in your home show them what the caregiving responsibilities entail.

Making the final decision

Choosing a caregiver is a serious decision that ought to be made with time and consideration. Remember to ask for other's input, such as that of your physician or therapist, and to take into consideration the approval of other household members who will interact with the new caregiver.



Once you've narrowed down the right person for the job and offer them the position, keep a flexible attitude. The first days may be rough — with you and your family acclimating to having help and the caregiver adjusting to the new responsibilities. Express gratitude and be patient, but also identify areas that need improvement and clearly communicate any problems that arise. For more resources on caregiving, such as how to maintain a positive relationship with your caregiver, visit www.DisabilityCampaign.org and the helpful websites listed below.

Helpful Websites

Disability Campaign: Caregiving

Downloadable resources on the topic of caregiving

<http://disabilitycampaign.org/help-resources/caregiving/>

The Family Caregiver Alliance National Center on Caregiving

A resource to use when hiring in-home help

<https://www.caregiver.org/hiring-home-help>

Care.com

A website for finding hired caregivers

<https://www.care.com/caregivers>

Elder Care Locator

Find a caregiver who specializes in elder care

<https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx>

Medline Plus: Caregivers

A website for caregiving resources including those from the National Institutes of Health

<https://medlineplus.gov/caregivers.html>

The National Alliance for Caregiving

Research, Advocacy, News, and Helpful Resources on Caregiving

<http://www.caregiving.org/>

VA Caregiver Support

Support for caregivers of veterans

<https://www.caregiver.va.gov/>

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