

Disability Campaign.org

Establishing a Caregiving Plan for an Elderly Parent

The National Alliance for Caregiving estimates that 36% of family caregivers care for a parent, with 7 out of 10 caregivers caring for a loved one over the age of 50. What's more, among people over the age of 65, 69% will develop disabilities, which means it's likely that — if your parent doesn't require care now — he or she will likely need care in the future.



In many families, the responsibility of caregiving lies on the adult children, be it to become the actual caregivers or to supervise the care given to their elderly parents. To some, caring for an aging parent may be the greatest honor of all — a way of returning the love and care that was granted to them years ago. Other families, however, may have a different attitude and position towards caring for an elderly parent. What's more your parent(s) may have specific opinions about the matter: perhaps your mother is adamant about living at home whereas you feel she would be best cared for at a skilled nursing facility. Regardless of where anyone stands, it's important that you take a few things into consideration when evaluating and establishing a plan of care for your elderly parents.

- 1. Assess how you feel about caregiving and be transparent with other relatives or people involved.** It's likely you'll experience a flood of emotions and thoughts when it comes to

addressing the type of care your aging parent needs. Whether you love the thought of caring for your parent or if it's more of an obligation that is weighing you down, or if you're terrified of how this will impact your life ... make sure you are having honest conversations about these feelings with someone. Talk to your spouse and other siblings. You may find out you're not alone with how you feel. Or, if you do not feel comfortable addressing this with other loved ones, talk to a counselor; perhaps he or she may help you sort through these feelings to get closer towards a plan of action.



2. Don't assume you know what type of care your parent wants — or that he or she will agree with your plan of care. It's very important that you respect the desires of your parent, so long as they are reasonable and safe desires. For example, if your parent wants to stay at home and refuses an at-home aid, yet he has the tendency to

fall and to leave the stove on, this is not a safe option.

Also, make sure to take into consideration your parent's judgment. Disability and old age do not mean that your parent can no longer make decisions for him or herself; however, some disabilities, such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease, may impair your parent's ability to make decisions. The good thing is, there are many care options: from living at home, to hiring a care attendant, to moving into a nursing or skilled care facility. It's a matter of finding which option meets the needs, wants, and abilities of everyone involved in the decision making process.

- 3. Be open to suggestions from others, including your parent's medical care team and other loved ones.** Your parent's doctor and medical care team will be able to give you some suggestions on what type of care is best for your parent based on his or her

physical, mental, and emotional needs. Other siblings, relatives, and even friends who have elderly parents may also be able to share some insight. Every case is unique, so make sure that you avoid comparing your situation to that of another family's. The best you can do is be well-informed before making a decision on your parent's care.

- 4. Know where your family stands financially and make a budget.** Your parent's disability or illness means added expenses, what with doctor's visits, new medications, and mobility devices. If you're moving your parent to your home, you may need to spend some money to adapt your home and make it more accessible. You'll also



need to factor in the cost associated with caring for your parent. If you need to stay at home to care for your parent, will that mean a loss of income for your household? What would be the cost of hiring a part-time aid? And if your parent is to move elsewhere, would it be, for example, to a low-income senior housing facility or an assisted living community? You may want to sit with a financial advisor to address the financial costs associated with your parent's care, assess what contributions your parent and other relatives can make, prepare a budget, and even perhaps look into additional sources of revenue, such as investments, to compensate for the added expenses.

- 5. Don't try to do it all on your own; seek help.** This applies to the decision making process, as well as the actual care itself. If you and your family have decided it's best for you to quit your job, stay at home, and care for your father — that's great, but do not try to do it all on your own. We all need help, and caregiving is a big job that can become too heavy for anyone to carry on his or her own. If you're feeling overwhelmed, remember you need to also care for your wellbeing. Lookout for your mental and physical health — after all, you can't care for your parent if something were to happen to you. Reach out to other

loved ones who can be of help, even if at least for a day or a few hours. Connect with your community to learn about free day programs for the elderly. Contact your place of worship and see if someone might be interested in visiting your parent or in running a few errands for you. Whatever it be, don't let yourself get worn down by the day-to-day challenges associated with caring for another person.



6. Re-evaluate the plan if needed. What works now may not work later. From time to time, evaluate how your parent's care is going. Perhaps the needs of your parent are increasing and you can't keep up with the demands of caregiving. Or maybe your husband just lost his job, and you need to get back into the

workforce to provide for your family. If your parent is in a care facility, it could be that the care she is receiving is no longer adequate or respectful. In any one of these situations, change is necessary; take some time to go through these steps and determine a new course of action. Remember, ultimately, the goal is for your parent to have the best care that is within your family's financial means, time, abilities, and family dynamics.

References

Caregiver Statistics. *Caregiver Action Network*. <http://caregiveraction.org/resources/caregiver-statistics>

Selected Long-Term Care Statistics. *Family Caregiver Alliance*. (2015, January 31). <https://www.caregiver.org/selected-long-term-care-statistics>

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