

Are you a relative or friend of an older, ill or disabled person? Is one family member responsible for providing or arranging most or all of the care? Do you want other family members and friends to become more involved? These tips can help.

Start with a family meeting.

- ✓ Call a family meeting to discuss caregiving needs and ways for each person to help.
- ✓ Include everyone who is able to contribute.
- ✓ Consider holding the meeting in a neutral location with few distractions. Or if your family is spread out geographically, the meeting can be held by email, in a private web chat room or through telephone conferencing.
- ✓ Make up an agenda ahead of time so that everyone can contribute.

How will decisions be made?

- ✓ If the person being cared for is able, he or she should have a say in how care needs are met.
- ✓ The person who has the primary responsibility--whether through providing care or arranging care by professionals--should also have a say.
- ✓ Other family members' views should be heard and respected, too.
- ✓ For health and legal decisions, the person being cared for can use durable power of attorney documents to designate someone to make decisions if he or she cannot.

If you disagree . . .

Understand that it is common for people to disagree about the best way to approach a caregiving situation.

- ✓ Make sure each person's concerns are heard.
- ✓ Try to reach a compromise.
- ✓ Avoid turning the disagreement into a feud.
- ✓ If you cannot agree, bring in an outside person such as a counselor, care manager or clergy member to act as a mediator.

Support the primary caregiver.

- ✓ Try to respect the person who is taking primary responsibility. He or she is doing a difficult job.
- ✓ If you see that a problem exists, offer solutions and encouragement, not criticism.

Don't be afraid to take charge.

- ✓ When there are several people involved, organization is very important.
- ✓ Make a list of what needs to be done. Ask people to volunteer for tasks.



- ✓ Consider having each person take responsibility for a different area of caregiving. For example, one person can take the person to medical appointments and get prescriptions filled. Another person can pay bills and research financial options.

What can you do if you don't feel others are carrying their weight?

- ✓ Find out why. It may be that a friend or family member would like to help out but isn't sure how.
- ✓ Sometimes a sibling assumes that the primary caregiver prefers to direct everything. He or she may not get involved unless asked directly.
- ✓ If a person is not participating because he or she does not agree with the course of care, talking through the issues may help.

Long distance support: How to help the primary caregiver when you can't be there.

What can you do if you live in another city or state?

- ✓ **Ask how you can help.** Offer ideas if the primary caregiver is unsure about how to proceed.
- ✓ **Offer emotional support.** Call and check in regularly. Be someone the caregiver can confide in.
- ✓ **Offer financial support.** Contribute to the household expenses or pay for respite care.
- ✓ **Make phone visits.** Spend time on the phone visiting with the person being cared for.
- ✓ **Give breaks.** Take over caregiving duties for a day or weekend each month or a week every few months. This provides breaks for the primary caregiver.
- ✓ **Do those tasks that can be done at a distance.** Research the disease or condition, or make phone calls to find out about support services.
- ✓ **Thank the primary caregiver.** Show your appreciation regularly.

Involving the whole family in caring for and supporting an older family member can make it easier on everyone. Look inside for ideas on how you can include others in caregiving.

To find information about support groups and other services in your area, consult your local Select Home Care office. You can also call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 or visit its website at www.eldercare.gov.