

When Friends and Neighbors Help with Caregiving

If you live far away from a loved one and they're lucky enough to have local help from a friend or neighbor, be sure to show your appreciation and support with the following tips.

Caregiving responsibilities usually fall to families. In fact, a full 90 percent of those providing care to adults age 65 and older are family members, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But what about the remaining 10 percent? When the elderly and aging have far-flung family, caregiving responsibilities often fall to friends and neighbors.

If you're a long-distance caregiver who is tapping into the assistance of your loved one's friends and neighbors, here are four things you want to keep top of mind.

Gratitude

First things first: Expressing your appreciation to anyone involved in the care of your long-distance loved one is essential. Whether it's text messages, greeting cards, gift cards, flowers or phone calls, never let an opportunity to say "thank you" pass you by. Your loved one's friend or neighbor may love nothing more than delivering groceries and driving to doctor's appointments, but you never want to risk anyone feeling taken for granted.



Communication

The more you and the local caregiver are communicating, the better. Just remember that the sheer act of communicating is another task for your loved one's friend or neighbor — and should be recognized as such. Be thankful for information you receive, and share your hopes and expectations about communication when necessary. Try something like, "The help you're providing is invaluable. I know reporting on my mom's condition takes up even more of your time, and I want you to know how much I appreciate it. That information really helps us work together to make sure she's doing well."

WHEN FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS HELP WITH CAREGIVING

As hard as you work at communicating well, there might be bumps in the road. The local caregiver might make a decision on your loved one's behalf without your input. You might make an appointment for your loved one without first checking with their caregiver's schedule. Apologize when you goof up, and try to make grace and forgiveness a two-way street.

Paperwork and Authorizations

Start a conversation with both your loved one and the local caregiver about what level of authorization and input makes everyone feel the most comfortable. If your long-distance loved one needs emergency medical treatment, the local caregiver needs to have the proper authorization in place to help make that happen and also to receive updates from medical professionals.

To add an Authorized Representative to the insurance of the person you care for, call the Customer Service number on the back of their member ID card and ask about adding an Authorized Representative.

Compensation

You may want to explore compensating your loved one's local caregiver for their time. At the very least, pay them for any out-of-pocket expenses incurred while caregiving. This might include meals, gas, parking, groceries, medicine and household supplies. Encourage your caregiving counterpart to keep receipts to submit to you regularly so you can reimburse them. Apps that allow secure money exchanges can be fast and convenient for these kinds of arrangements.

All scenarios are different, but beyond mere expenses, you might want to pay the local caregiver on a weekly or monthly basis. Research [care.com](https://www.care.com) or contact "senior care" or "elder care" companies in your loved one's city to get an idea of typical hourly rates for professional care, and propose a payment structure as a starting point for conversation. In some cases, your loved one's friend or neighbor might refuse to be paid. Even so, bring up the idea of compensation every few months. If you're taken up on the idea, great. But even if you're not, you're making sure the local caregiver feels valued — and that goes a long way in maintaining a healthy and effective team approach to caregiving.

Sources:

Unpaid Eldercare in the United States: 2017-2018 Summary

<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/elcare.nr0.htm>

Caregiver Statistics: Demographics

<https://www.caregiver.org/caregiver-statistics-demographics>

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