

Family Dynamics and Caregiving

10 tips for negotiating caregiving duties between family members.

The scenario is all too common: An older parent requires more care to live independently. Of that parent's three adult children, one steps up to the plate and devotes countless hours of care. The second sibling may touch base with the parent and the caretaker from time to time, helping out to a limited degree when asked. The third sibling shows little interest in the parent's well-being and rarely if ever offers to help in any way. Frustration and resentment grow, and the family dynamic suffers as a result.

Fortunately, it doesn't always have to be that way. Though caregiving can be emotional and overwhelming, there are also ways it can help bring you closer through the process of caring for someone you all love. Here are ten tips to help you communicate better, play to each other's strengths and divide up the work of caregiving fairly.

1. Talk early and often.

Ideally, your family will talk about caregiving before an older family member is at the point of needing help. When you're gathered together for birthdays or holidays, initiate upbeat conversations about caregiving. Ask your parents what their hopes are. Would they like to live with one of their kids? Do they want to stay in their own home as long as possible? Are they eager to enjoy the benefits of a senior living community? Talking about hopes and expectations now can prepare everyone for the future.



2. Play into each other's strengths and capabilities.

One of you might have a spacious home with a mother-in-law suite. One of you might be skilled at financial planning. One of you might have your days free to shuttle a parent to and from medical appointments. A sibling who lives a few hours away can be in charge of setting up online services like grocery delivery and prescription refills. Talk about what each of you is best able to bring to the caregiving table.

FAMILY DYNAMICS AND CAREGIVING

3. Define responsibilities and tasks.

Once a loved one is requiring help, you'll be able to get a clear sense of what tasks are involved in his or her care. List everything out and work together to divvy up the tasks as equally as possible.

4. Recognize and reward a sibling who does more than his or her fair share.

Often, the family member who lives closest to the care recipient will do the lion's share of caregiving. If that's the case, make sure that person feels appreciated and supported. Check in frequently, and don't take the arrangement for granted. Give him or her a break for caregiving duties frequently, even if that means the other siblings have to take a day off work or drive a few hours to help.

5. Consider paying a family member who steps forward to provide care.

To take tip #4 a step further, in some cases it makes sense to pay a family caregiver. Someone who gives up his or her own job, allowing other family members to maintain their regular lives, likely deserves compensation. Whether it's the aging parent or other family members who provide the compensation (or a combination of both), draw up terms that outline the caregiver's responsibilities, schedule and pay structure. You can rely on the help of an attorney to do this.

6. Allow each other to tap in and tap out.

Life happens. Give each other the space to take breaks from caregiving when necessary — for example, dropping off a child at college or going on a family vacation. Don't keep score, but do keep the lines of communication open. It's okay to email your siblings and say, "This is the fourth time I've driven Mom to her physical therapy this month; can one of you take her to next week's appointment?"

7. Respect each other's circumstances.

If one of your siblings loses their job, they may not be in a position to help out with the financial aspects of caregiving for a while. A brother who is going through marital problems may understandably pull back from caregiving duties while he prioritizes his nuclear family. Do your best to pick up each other's slack, knowing that the favor will be returned for you someday.

8. Pool your resources.

Even when families work together to provide care, there may be times when you all need a break. Respite care is like a release valve that can ease caregiving pressure points. Look into respite care options together, and consider making equal financial contributions to hire a temporary professional caregiver.

FAMILY DYNAMICS AND CAREGIVING

9. Be realistic.

There is no perfect caregiving scenario. There will be highs and lows. You may have times you argue and times you band together and see the unity that's offered through a difficult circumstance. Celebrate the good things together. Send group texts with positive updates and funny musings. Conversely, be there for each other in the tough times, knowing that caregiving can be a difficult job, even when the responsibility is shared.

10. Remember what's important.

Through it all, remember that your family is working together to ensure the best possible life for your loved one. Your family history might be messy. Your caregiving journey might be bumpy. But what you are working together to achieve is noble and good — and you should all take pride in that.

Plans are insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare. This article is for your information and convenience only and does not replace the care or advice of a doctor. Always talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program, therapy, or medication. The health information provided in this guide is general in nature and is not medical advice or a substitute for professional health care. UnitedHealthcare does not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of the information, and does not recommend or endorse the products which are referenced in the guide.

©2020 United HealthCare Services, Inc.

Y0066_SPRJ55116_C