

Long-Distance Caregiving

There are millions of caregivers throughout America—many of whom do not live close to their loved one. Long-distance caregiving can be challenging and there are many issues that caregivers face when providing care long distance.

The National Institute of Aging reports that nearly seven million Americans are caring for a loved one long distance.

For families who live far away from a loved one, it is usually part of a routine to call and check-in periodically. What might have been a social call to share stories about family now may become a daily phone call to confirm that medication is being taken, bills are being paid or that the stove has been turned off.

It is hard to think about loved ones aging and becoming unable to care for themselves. But as more and more signs begin to surface, you might be faced with some tough decisions. Caring for a loved one long-distance is challenging and can be overwhelming. You can connect with local friends or others who interact with your family member and ask for their help and guidance on the situation and need.

Listed below are some things that you should consider when dealing with a long-distance caregiving arrangement.

I. Plan a visit to assess the living conditions.

When you realize that your loved one needs additional assistance, care, or services, it may be a good idea to plan a visit and assess the situation yourself. Take time to visit with your loved one(s) while also keeping in mind to take note of the living conditions.

During your visit, identify possible risks and dangerous hazards. Are there physical items in the home that may cause a fall or an injury? Take a look at the items in the refrigerator and identify if any food has spoiled. Look around the bedroom and bathroom area and notice the cleanliness of these rooms. Are things picked up and put away? Is there food or other items left out? All of these small things can actually highlight that there might be an issue. Perhaps there is increased forgetfulness or memory loss.



II. Work together with a sibling or other family members who may live close by. Many long distance caregivers can help with those who are providing day-to-day care. Perhaps there is a sibling who lives close to your loved one. Check in and talk to your sibling often. You can provide emotionally support to the primary caregiver. Stay in contact by phone or email. Long-distance caregivers can do some of the “busy work” that a primary caregiver might not have time for. This may include arranging for professional services, hiring home health aids, researching local community programs, pay bills online or keeping other family and friends updated.

III. Set a plan of responsibilities. Conduct a family meeting when most everyone is available and determine roles and responsibilities. Include your aging loved one if you’d like. Have a calm discussion about what type of care is needed and what the action plan is for future emergencies. Taking care of these details early on will help everyone stay organized and know what to do if faced with an emergency.

IV. Get Organized. Another important task is getting organized. It is a good idea that someone in the family is the primary holder of all paperwork.

Important information to keep track of and to have on hand may include:

- Full legal name and residence
- Birthdates and place, birth certificate
- Social Security and Medicare numbers

- Employer(s) and dates of employment
- Education and military records
- Sources of income and assets
- Insurance policies, bank accounts, deeds, investments and other valuables
- Most recent income tax return
- Money owed, to whom and when payments are due
- Credit card account names and numbers
- Safe deposit box key and information
- Will, beneficiary information
- Durable power of attorney
- Living will and/or durable power of attorney for health care
- Where cash or other valuables might be kept in the home

Resources

The National Alliance for Caregiving
www.caregiving.org

HelpGuide

www.helpguide.org/topics/caregiving.htm

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