
YOUR WELL-BEING

“MOM JUST TURNED 79. SHE’S DETERMINED TO STAY IN HER OWN HOME BUT WANTS ME ON CALL TO HELP WITH EVERYTHING. I’M DOING THE BEST I CAN BECAUSE I’M ALL SHE HAS. BUT MY JOB, MY FAMILY, AND EVERYTHING ELSE ARE SUFFERING. SHE REFUSES TO DO LAUNDRY AND GO GROCERY SHOPPING. I’M AT MY WITS’ END.”

ELEANOR, AGE 48
ILLINOIS

HELPING YOURSELF IS AS IMPORTANT AS HELPING YOUR PARENTS

Most adult children find that when their parents occasionally need help, they can drop everything and do what’s necessary. Many start running into trouble, however, when assistance is needed on an ongoing basis. The daily demands of caring for an elderly parent can be overwhelming, even in the best of circumstances.

Whether you are in the early stages of helping your parents plan their future or in the midst of singlehandedly trying to manage everything for them, it’s important for you to find out what resources are available to help your parents. It is equally important for you to locate and tap into resources to help yourself. After all, if you are exhausted, depressed, or ill as a result of trying to “do it all,” you’re in no shape to help anyone.

WHERE YOU CAN TURN FOR HELP

In addition to the many national organizations listed in this guide’s Directory of Resources, pages 40-60, and the local businesses and nonprofit groups (see *Finding Local Services*, page 12) that can assist you, there are several other resources to investigate for both periodic and ongoing help for your parents as well as for yourself. These resources include:

YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR PARENTS’ CLOSE FRIENDS

Brothers, sisters, or other relatives are the logical people for you to call on for help. Even if siblings cannot always be available physically, their willingness to be involved is a big advantage. If your siblings don’t offer their help, ask them for it. Be honest about your own needs as well as those of your parents. Divide up the ongoing duties such as grocery shopping, driving to appointments, bill paying, and daily telephone calls to chat and confirm that everything is all right. If you are an only child, ask a relative or friend to help by giving you regularly scheduled breaks each week or month.

ADULT DAYCARE

Adult daycare centers specialize in providing care for the frail elderly, adults who are physically impaired, and/or those with dementia, confusion problems, and Alzheimer's Disease. Adult daycare centers offer health-related and rehabilitative services, social interaction, and a variety of activities. If your parent cannot be at home alone during the day and/or requires frequent health-related and rehabilitative services, an adult daycare center may be the answer. Such centers also offer the frail older person a chance to socialize with others.

HOME HEALTH CARE

These services are helpful if your parent needs various levels of nursing care or other professional health services in their home or yours. Home health care services include registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, home health aides, and companions, as well as occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech therapists, and social workers. Your local hospitals, Visiting Nurse Associations (VNA), and Area Agency on Aging (AAA) can help you in obtaining the assistance your parents may require. Medicare and health insurance may cover some of these services.

GERIATRIC CARE MANAGERS

If you feel your parents need more care than you are able to give, a private geriatric care manager may be the answer. Geriatric care managers are especially helpful if you live a long distance from your parents. These professionals can assess your parents' needs and home situation, then coordinate and monitor the necessary care and services. They work closely with all family members and may be helpful in keeping lines of communication open. Contact the social worker at a hospital near your parents for names of geriatric care managers or call the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers (see the Directory of Resources, p. 44).

TEMPORARY CARE FROM HOSPITALS, NURSING HOMES AND PERSONAL CARE FACILITIES

If you are managing everything for your parents and need some time off or a vacation with your own family, a "respite" care program may be the answer. Respite care programs, developed by hospitals and nursing homes in many communities, are designed to provide temporary 24-hour care for an elderly individual at a special facility or in their own home. The purpose of the care is to allow the primary caregiver some short-term relief from day-to-day responsibilities. If possible, compare several respite programs and rates. You'll also want to check whether your parents' health or long-term care insurance will cover periodic respite care.

SENIOR CENTERS

These neighborhood centers offer a variety of programs and services for the well elderly. The center's offerings will vary, but can include inexpensive meals, exercise classes, trips to local museums and events, and many other health, nutritional, educational, and recreational activities. Visit a local center, meet with the Director, and ask for a copy of the weekly or monthly schedule of programs and events so you can help your parents plan which activities they may want to attend.

PRACTICAL HINT

*Read through the list of books
and video tapes listed in*

*Additional Source Material,
pages 61-63. You may find
particularly insightful Claire*

Berman's book, Caring for

Yourself While Caring for

Your Aging Parents: How to

Help, How to Survive.

PRACTICAL HINT

If you are planning a leave of absence under the Family and Medical Leave Act, both you and your employer have the option to substitute certain types of paid leave (e.g., vacation time) for the unpaid leave. You should discuss this option with your company's human resources department.

These senior centers can also be a valuable source of information on other services for the elderly that may be available locally.

YOUR PLACE OF WORSHIP

Local religious organizations often provide dependable volunteers who make home visits. If they can't help, they may be able to recommend someone who can.

SUPPORT GROUPS

You need not feel alone as you go through the caregiving experience with your family. Many adult children become isolated by their inability to communicate the difficulties they are going through. You should be able to find a support group in your community that includes other caregivers with whom you can share your experiences. You will also learn coping skills and find out about other resources and services available to you and your parents. Check with your Area Agency on Aging for support group information.

YOUR EMPLOYER

Many employers have become aware of the growing number of employees who are providing care for an elder and have developed programs to assist these working caregivers. Check with your company's human resources department or Employee Assistance Program to find out what you are eligible for and what support is available through your place of employment.

THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

Enacted in August, 1993, this federal law entitles an eligible worker to unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks a year, either at one time or intermittently, to care for the employee's seriously ill parent, without loss of job security or health benefits. To be eligible, companies may require medical certification from a doctor to support your claim that your parent is seriously ill and in need of your care. Family leave regulations generally apply to those individuals who have worked for the company for at least a year, put in at least 1,250 hours of work during the previous 12 months, and are employed by companies with a minimum number of employees within certain geographic distances. Reinstatement may not be required for those individuals who are classified by their employers as key employees, e.g., individuals who are among the highest-paid ten percent of its workers. For more information, ask your employer for a copy of your rights under the Family and Medical Leave Act, or contact the Wage and Hour Division of your regional Department of Labor.