

As your parents or other relatives age, you may find yourself transitioning into a new role as a caregiver. Whether you live down the street or across the country, you may become suddenly responsible for medical, legal and financial aspects of your relative's care.

Elder Care Planning

An elder care plan can be a helpful resource for you, your family and your elder. A care plan maps out the areas where assistance is needed and can help you to divide responsibilities among family members. In order for a care plan to be effective, everyone should be involved in the planning process, including your elder.

Deciding if the Time Is Right

It can be difficult to determine how your elder will react to your offers to help, since such offers can signal a decline in independence. Begin by talking with your elder about his or her physical and mental states and ask where the elder feels assistance might be needed. Some things to consider are:

- › **Everyday activities.** Some elders simply need help with simple chores, such as cooking, cleaning or shopping. Others need more extensive assistance with daily activities, such as bathing, eating and medication administration. The amount and type of assistance that your elder needs can help guide you in your search for appropriate care.
- › **Driving.** Many elders continue to drive long after they are able to safely operate a vehicle. The independence of driving can be difficult to give up. Some signs to watch out for are a high number of at-fault accidents, unexplained scratches or dents in the car or getting lost on a more frequent basis. If you feel that your elder should no longer drive, consider enlisting the help of his or her physician; sometimes an expert's opinion can be helpful.

- › **Physical appearance.** Your elder's physical appearance can give you some clues as to how he or she is functioning on a daily basis. If your elder seems to be getting thin, perhaps a meal program would help him or her to eat better and more regularly. Also look for signs such as unexplained cuts or bruises or a general decline in grooming habits.
- › **Emotional state.** A depressed or lonely mood can be a signal for a lot of issues. Your elder may need to talk with his or her physician to determine the cause of these moods. Or, he or she may need to find more social outlets, such as senior centers or independent-living retirement communities.

Talking directly with your elder can provide him or her with reassurance that you care and only have your elder's best interests at heart. If you show that you are really listening up front, your elder may feel more comfortable talking to you about needing help in the future.

Building a Care Network

It is nearly impossible for one person to cover all aspects of an elder's care without assistance. In order to help avoid getting burned out, you may want to build up a network of people and resources that are available to assist both you and your elder. Some aspects of creating this network include:

- › Identifying the "primary" caregiver
- › Enlisting help from trusted friends, neighbors and family
- › Dividing responsibilities among available caregivers
- › Researching local community resources
- › Discussing the situation with your elder's physician



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Determining Care Needs

The following questions can be useful in helping to determine the types of care that your elder needs:

- › Can your elder safely continue to live in his or her current residence? Can your elder afford to continue living in his or her current residence? Does your elder want to move from his or her current residence or does he or she want to remain there?
- › Does your elder need help with activities of daily living, also called ADLs?
- › What medical conditions does your elder have? What types of care may be needed in the future in order to manage these conditions?
- › Are there finances available to cover future medical needs?
- › Are wills, advance directives and trusts in order? Do you know where they are kept?
- › Can your elder continue to drive safely or is transportation assistance needed?

Creating a List of Emergency Contacts

Everyone involved in some aspect of your elder's care, including the elder, should have an updated emergency contact list.

This list should include contact information for:

- › Family members
- › Doctors and hospitals
- › Financial planners
- › Attorney
- › Neighbors and friends
- › Geriatric care worker, if available

You should also ensure that you know the location of all important medical, legal and financial records, as well as maintaining a set of keys to both your elder's home and car.

For more information on this and other topics contact [GuidanceResources](#) or your HR department.