

Getting the Help You Need

Experts all agree ... Caregivers who receive help and support are less stressed and more able to care for their loved one longer. Yet asking for help, or even acknowledging that we need it, is not easy. Sometimes there may be no one to ask. More often, it is our own beliefs about caregiving that prevent us from reaching out.

“I should be able to take care of my mother (or father, or husband, or wife) myself”

Under normal circumstances this would be true, but caring for someone with dementia is beyond normal circumstances. Needing help does not mean you are not doing a good job, or that you are being lazy or self-centered. It's simply an acknowledgement of how much is involved in caring for someone with dementia.

“I don't want anyone to know how bad things are.”

Caregivers sometimes feel disloyal talking about their loved one's decline. They may not feel ready to discuss the situation or they may want to protect family members from the distress of knowing how impaired the person is. While this is understandable, it can also be very isolating. Sometimes it helps to talk to people outside one's circle of friends and family. Telephone helplines and support groups can be very useful in this regard.

“No one can care for him or her the way I do.”

This is true. No one is going to care for your loved one the way that you do. But it is also true that your loved one can receive adequate care from someone else. Some people with dementia are upset when their usual caregiver is not around and it may take time for them to adjust. Others can easily enjoy the company of another person for a period of time.

Asking For Help

Make a list of people who you can ask for help or who have offered to help you. Do not be vague in your requests. Be specific. “Can you stay with your Dad on Thursday afternoon while I go to the store?” “Can you bring the dog to the vet for me?” “Can you call and make doctor appointments?” “Can you call this agency and ask about their services?” “Can you help me fill out this application for home care?” Remember, friends and families can't know what you need unless you tell them.

Learning a New Skill

Becoming a caregiver involves learning many new skills. “Asking for help” is one of those skills. With time and practice it can become easier. The hardest part is getting started.

For more information, call the COPSA Alzheimer's Helpline at (800) 424-2494

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