



Caregiver's
Companion:
A Practical Guide
to Achieving Harmony
in Your Caregiving
Role

By: Robin Weeks

ROBIN'S *Journey*

Becoming the primary caregiver for my parent wasn't a calling... It was just what I did as the only daughter.



Caregiving is hard. It is lonely, and it is a roller coaster of emotions.

When I was a caregiver to my mom, it changed me.

Our journey together was the hardest thing I have ever done. I made a lot of compromises, and I made many mistakes along my path. Those years were some of the best and most heartbreaking.

I also learned so much... how to better care for myself, how to be prepared for the events that will happen and where to go for resources.

Yet something was always lacking.

I felt like I didn't know anyone who could relate. I didn't know where to go for support. I tried support groups, but they didn't offer the level of help and compassion I needed. I tried self-help books, but it wasn't more information I was after.

ROBIN'S *Journey*

**I needed a place where I could be open and candid,
somewhere I didn't feel judged or labeled...**

Trust me, I had enough self-imposed guilt that I didn't need or want anyone else dishing that up as well.

Yet no matter where I looked, I couldn't find a community that managed to nurture my emotional, social, and spiritual needs, nor one that provided the day-to-day insight I desperately craved.

After my mother passed, I decided to create something in her memory.

My Pivotal Point is an incarnation of that time.

I have taken my journals from those years, my memories, and my recorded conversations, and fused them with the training I have since taken, plus countless conversations with other caregivers, to create the PATH Program you are about to embark on.

My hope is that this feels like a loving place you can go -- free of judgment or criticism. A place that you can turn to for education, support, laughter, tears, and to have your questions answered.

Thank you for being here, and thank you for the hard work you do every day.

You are appreciated.

Letter to my readers



Dear Caregiver,

I am so glad to have you here with us on your caregiving PATH. You may have started some time ago or are just beginning in this role. I have information, education, resources, tips, and strategies for no matter where you are on your PATH.

This booklet is based on content from the Insights and Learning section of your membership. Inside, you'll find pages to journal and reflect on, pages for you to keep records, pages for you to learn from, and pages to inspire you throughout your journey.

Caregiving is hard. I won't tell you otherwise. It also can bring you moments of love, compassion, joy, and sadness. This is an opportunity to embrace these many emotions and feel true, deep compassion for another person. Even on the hardest days of caregiving, there is something rewarding about taking care of another person when they most need it...

Letter to my readers continued

My approach is proactive. I learned the long, hard way that taking a preparing, planning, and mindfulness stance helps you keep your life in balance and harmony. When stresses hit you (and they will), you can come to your Companion to write or find a resource and support.

Please note that while many of the resources listed within this Companion are U.S.-based, I certainly appreciate my international audience. I have tried to incorporate as many resources as possible from around the world; however, in the interest of brevity, I have focused primarily on the country where most members are located. I will continue updating this with global resources as soon as possible.

Know that I'm here to guide and nurture you on this PATH through caregiving. Please reach out if there's anything I can do to better support you!

*With love,
Robin Weeks*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

Gratitude &
Gifts

21

Health & Safety

43

Record
Keeping

49

Family
Dynamics

61

Getting Help &
Getting Paid

71

Self-Care

93

Challenges &
Wins

102

Mindfulness

128

Employers

134

Reflections
Journaling

142

Resources

149

Important
Terms



GRATITUDE & GIFTS





Express Your Gratitude... to Improve Your Health

Caregiving has ups and downs. While it can seem like there are more downs than ups, it's important to teach your brain to recognize the gifts, the moments of happiness between you and your loved one. Writing 3 reasons for gratitude every day can shift your brain and make it easier to then handle the tougher moments.

Emotions can bottle up inside you, but you don't have to let them. You can master your thoughts, feelings, and emotions and learn to let them out in positive ways, so they don't cause you stress and harm.

One of the best ways to improve your health and handle your emotions is by expressing your gratitude. Yes, really!

Ask yourself: What are you thankful for? Who matters in your life? Even when life may not be going as planned, there are still many things to be grateful for.

Give Your Gratitude Away

No matter how much you appreciate someone in your life, that person may not have any idea about how you feel. Rather than just assume they know your thoughts and feelings, go ahead and speak up. Tell them how you really feel and what's in your heart.



See the smile? It feels good, doesn't it? When you smile back, laugh, and even share tears of joy and love, it helps your heart, mind, and body thrive. It releases a flood of chemicals that your body just loves. It's a "feel-good" thing to do. That's true for both you and the receiver of your gratitude.

Maybe you're grateful for something you have, as opposed to a person. Did you ever think about sending a thankful message to the company that makes the products you love? They probably hear all about customer complaints, but how much gratitude do they get for the work they've done to make lives better or more convenient? Give them some of your gratitude and you'll spread joy all around!

Ways to Show Your Gratitude

Showing gratitude is something you can do quite easily and all it costs you is a little bit of time and effort.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Tell your loved ones you care for them.
- Hug a friend who's hurting.
- Smile at a stranger.
- Write to a company whose product or service you really love.
- Make time to listen to someone who needs to talk.
- Spend some time out in nature, appreciating the beauty of creation.
- Volunteer your services or help someone in need.



You can also show your gratitude just for being alive by treating others well and being kind to yourself. Relaxing and taking time to unwind from the stress of everyday life is very important, and you'll be happier and healthier because of it.

Focus on What Really Matters

Many people are unhappy with their circumstances, and it's often because they feel they don't have enough money, a big house, or the ultimate car. These things are nice, but in the grand scheme of things, they don't really matter. After all, when you're on your deathbed, will you wish you had that red Ferrari? Or will you wish that you had more time with your loved ones?

Connect with what really matters by being grateful for all you've been given.

There will be obstacles and stumbling blocks in life, but there is joy all around you as well. When you tap into that joy, keep a positive attitude, and show how grateful you are, you'll prove that you're able to let go of unnecessary baggage. It's a great feeling, and one that you can give yourself, today, right now. What a wonderful thing to be grateful for!



Reaping the Benefits of a Gratitude Journal

It might seem like a pipe dream that writing in a journal could be so beneficial. But the scientific evidence is in, and gratitude journals do benefit you in big ways if you keep one for the long term and use it daily. It's a mind shift. Thinking and writing about your gratitude creates new pathways in your brain that create a more positive view.

Experience Stronger & More Fulfilling Relationships

It's so simple, but it can be hard to accept. You are the one who makes yourself happy with your own choices. Another person cannot make you happy or grateful. Only you can do that. But something amazing happens when you express gratitude often ñ your relationships simply open up and become better. Those that don't, you start to recognize what they are and let them go.

Become Physically Healthier

Being grateful for the ability to move and breathe will eventually cross over into wanting to ensure that you can always do that. Therefore, you'll be more motivated to go on walks, eat right, stay hydrated, and live in gratitude for every aspect of your life.



Increase Your Mental Dexterity

The ability to take lemons and turn them into that sweet, delightful state drink of Arizona can be gained by keeping a gratitude journal. The main reason is that you will learn on even a bad day to pick out the good in it. That requires a good imagination and creativity and thinking on your feet.

Feel Less Aggression in Your Life

It's hard to feel aggressive if you are happy and grateful. It's okay to be angry about injustices in the world without being aggressive. But if you feel angry a lot due to your life, it's really due to not finding the things to be grateful about. There is almost always something for most people.

Act and Become More Empathetic

As you write more and learn to forgive yourself as you seek to fill your mind with thoughts of gratitude, you will start seeing others differently. You'll have more ability to put yourself in their shoes and see things from their way without judgment. It happens when you learn to forgive yourself.



Get More Restful Sleep

If you're not anxious but go to sleep each night feeling thankful for everything you've experienced (or at least most of it), it's easier to sleep because you have less anxiety.

Get More Done Every Day

Due to feeling more rested, less stressed, and more grateful, you'll have a lot more energy to get things done every day. That is always going to make you feel even more thankful because good things happen due to productivity.

Feel Better About Yourself

You can't help but feel better about yourself when you have improved so many good qualities about yourself. Your self-esteem will go up when you express gratitude for what your mind and body can do for you.

If you want to be happier, get more done in life, and experience real joy, a gratitude journal can be the way to achieve it. The guiding thing to remember is that your thoughts cause your feelings, and you are the one in control of the actions you take once you accept your feelings. Accepting that you do have control is half the battle, and your journal will make it clear that you do.



Gratitude Journal For

Caregivers



Gratitude has been identified as one way for caregivers to cope with the stress of their duties. Write three things you are grateful for each day.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.



DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.



DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.



DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.



DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.



DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.



DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.



DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.



DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.

DATE:

TODAY I'M GRATEFUL FOR...

1.

2.

3.



Gratitude & Gifts

“Some days there won't be a song in your heart.
Sing anyway.”

Emory Austin | Speaker



HEALTH & SAFETY



Make A Plan for Your PATH



Use this as a daily way to remind yourself of what you need.
Prepare, Plan and Be Mindful

I AM GRATEFUL FOR:

I WILL TUNE INTO:

MY SELF-CARE INCLUDES:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foods | <input type="checkbox"/> Friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> Family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laughter | <input type="checkbox"/> Hobbies/ Fun |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spirit | |

I WILL FORGIVE:

My Care Plan

We need care plans for all sorts of situations. This worksheet is for you to create those plans so that when a situation occurs you can refer here and not panic for help or resources.

Important Documents Can Be Found Here:

--

In Case of An Emergency:



My Care Plan

What do I need to do first?

Am I prepared with gas in the car, phone charged and charger with me?

Do I know where the important medical records are?

What is the name and phone number of my loved one's medical doctor?

--

How will I take care of my work?

Who will pick up the kids? Take care of my pets?

My Plan for a Vacation, Break or Business Trip is:



Do I have all the important contacts stored on my phone?

Who is my backup in case of an emergency?

How will they reach me?

What level of responsibility do they have, or have I given them?

Which family members can help and what can they do?

Who are the neighbors I can rely on for help?



My Plan if I Am Ill or Injured Is:

Who is my number one back up person?

What decision making limits do they have?

Who is my number two back up person?

How much responsibility are they willing to take on?

What will I need done for my parent, spouse, other?

Who will take care of my family?



Who needs to be contacted?

Siblings?

Names:

--

Numbers:

--

Neighbors?

Names:

--

Numbers:

--

Friends?

Names:

--

Numbers:

--

What Other Situations Will I Need to Plan For?



Easing into Caregiving

There is one axiom that if your parents don't pass away young in life, you are going to watch them age. Now for the most part, this is a natural and nice part of life because mom and dad can slowly become grandma and grandpa which are nice roles for them after working so hard to raise you.

But a corollary to that axiom is that if mom and dad are going to age, at some point you are going to begin helping them with the daily affairs of life. And that occasional helping will escalate as their needs grow strong until you will become a full-fledged caregiver for an elderly person.

For many, the time when you suddenly become a caregiver is just that – sudden. It happens often after the death of a parent and the widowed parent suddenly becomes needy because of the loss they are experiencing. For married couples who have been together for decades, that loss is equivalent to the loss of a limb and far more devastating so that may be the time when you suddenly go from having few concerns for your aging parent to having many.

It might be strange to look at it this way, but the more you can ease into care giving, the more time you must get used to it, for your elderly parent or parents to get used to it and for your family, friends and coworkers to get used to it. And if you can step in and make some minor changes to the environment of your aging parent, you may be able to delay the time when they become very dependent on you.



- Go through the house and make it easy for your parents to use. You can put in those walking and grab bars along the halls and in the bathtub and other places where your mom or dad might need the additional support. You can check the lights so there is plenty of visibility for what your parents must do.

To really take the preparation of your parent's living space for their ease of use and safety, look at pulling emergency pull ropes in every room. These units are used extensively in assisted care units, and they make it possible for your parent to pull that cord if she is in trouble and set off an alarm or call to you or to emergency care, should there be a sudden medical need.

By working to make your parent's work area easy to use and safe, you can do a lot to put off the time when your mom or dad may have to move to a retirement village or nursing home. And you keep them independent which allows you to slowly ease into caregiving which is much easier on everybody.



If your parent or parents are still living in their own home, there are things you can do to make their living space more accessible and safe including...

- Create a lifestyle that is all on one level. Stairs can become a hazard for an elderly person. So early in your plans to adapt their living space, move them into a ground floor bedroom and put all significant rooms, including the kitchen, the pantry, the laundry room, and the living room on the same level.
- Take some of the work out of daily chores. Most local grocery stores will deliver food to the elderly so you can make those arrangements for your aging parent. You can also find services that work by the hour that come in and clean the house, do simple repairs and chores, and take care of the business of homeownership for your parents.
- You can decide with home health care professionals to drop by for an hour or two a week just to make sure your parents' medications are still safe to use, that all prescriptions have been filled and that your parents understand their medications and when and how to take them.
- Reorganize the kitchen so things your parents will use every day are on an eye level shelf and are easy to get to and to put away after washing. Make sure the toaster oven, microwave and other important appliances are also easy to get to and that your parents are comfortable with these units if the models that may have come with the assisted living center are not familiar to them.



A Place To Go

When you first started working with your elderly mom or dad in helping them settle into their retired lifestyle, you exposed yourself to all kinds of services that can help take care of senior citizens. If you feel your parent could use being with people during the day but you are not able to be free to provide that support because of your job, the idea of an adult daycare is often suggested as a solution to the problem.

Of course, the phrase “adult daycare” can be upsetting because it only goes to reinforce the image of your adult parent becoming an infant and having to be treated as such.

So, when you suggest that you work together to find a place, they can spend time during the day, don’t refer to it as an “adult day care” if you can. Immediately the senior citizen will feel that you are just “putting him away” somewhere so he won’t be a nuisance to you. And you don’t want him to get that idea.

But many seniors are open to going to a senior citizen’s center or to a church program for the elderly that serves the same function. The best way to find the right adult day care situation for your parent is for you and your elderly parent to take a tour of what is available locally and make the decision together. To do that, you will want to come armed with some pertinent questions for you to get some peace of mind about letting your mom or dad spend time there each day.



Questions to Ask:

- Do they provide transportation to the different assisted care facilities in town? Does that transportation continue to run all day? You don't want your parent going to the center and "getting stuck" there. If there is transportation, that won't happen.
- Do they have qualified medical people on hand should any problem come up?
- How many seniors are there on any given day? Too few implies that the center isn't providing good service. Too many and your parent could get lost in the shuffle.
- Do you provide food and beverages if the stay is all day? Are your food services sensitive to diet issues if your parent is diabetic or has other diet restrictions given to him by his doctor?
- What are the costs?

Of course, for your mom or dad, the activities that the day care center offers will be a big part of their willingness to go there. During football season, if the center just provides a place where elderly men can cheer for the game or have other sports programming available, that is a lot more fun for your dad than sitting alone in his apartment and watching those same sports.

If the day care center has a variety of activities that appeal specifically to each gender and then others that everyone can enjoy such as card games or puzzles, it could be an upbeat and fun place for your parent to pass the day.



By spending some time there, you can get a feel for the friendliness of the staff and the general atmosphere of the center to determine if this will be a warm and welcoming place where your parent will have some fun and meet new people or a place where he will feel alone and out of place.

But if you can find a good day care center for your senior citizen, it can take a big load off your mind. And if you know he is having fun each day and getting out with people, you know that will be healthy for him and be invigorating so he will eat better and sleep better that night. And that solves a lot of problems all at once.

Questions to Ask a Care Facility



Take this list of questions with you when visiting an assisted living facility, nursing home, or adult family home.

1. What is included with your 'doctor care' service:
 - a. Does he/she actually see patients or just review records and give orders?
 - b. How often does the doctor see residents?
 - c. Can you meet with the doctor?
 - d. If you are POA, will you want to have approval of medications?
 - e. How quickly are you contacted in the event of an emergency, fall, or illness?
2. What is involved with your 'nursing care' service:
 - a. What can a nurse offer in terms of care?
 - b. What is the nurse's level of licensing?
 - c. What is the ratio of nurses to Certified Nursing Assistants?
 - d. What is the ratio of care staff to residents?
3. How frequently do you check on residents:
 - a. Coming to meals
 - b. Encourage them to participate in activities
4. If residents share a room and the roommate is not compatible, can they change?
 - a. YES
 - b. NO
5. Is there a social worker on staff?
 - a. ALWAYS
 - b. SOMETIMES
 - c. NEVER

Questions to Ask a Care Facility



6. Do you provide the residents with your own transportation?

- a. ALWAYS
- b. SOMETIMES
- c. NEVER

7. Do you rely on public transportation to transport residents?

- a. ALWAYS
- b. SOMETIMES
- c. NEVER

8. Tell me about your laundry care:

- a. Frequency?
- b. Hot water and industrial tubs?

9. How do you monitor diets:

- a. Is there a nutritionist on staff?
- b. Do you offer flexible meal options?
- c. What happens if a resident stops eating?

10. What is included in the monthly or annual cost:

- a. TV?
- b. Internet?
- c. Phone?
- d. Medication Management?
- e. Entertainment?
- f. Hygiene?
- g. Meals?

Questions to Ask a Care Facility



11. What about housekeeping:

- a. How often?
- b. What is the scope of cleaning services included?
- c. Are the housekeepers insured?
- d. Are the housekeepers part of your normal staff or contracted out?

12. What sort of activities are offered and how often:

- a. Are outings offered to those who are mobile?
- b. Is mobility assistance available?
- c. Is there an onsite Activities Director?
- d. What types, and how many, activities are planned in a week?
- e. How are residents informed of the activities offered?
- f. Look at a sample schedule or ask to attend an activity.

13. How often do you hold family care planning meetings and how will I be notified when they take place?

14. What happens if my loved one experiences an emergency?

15. What else should I know?



When Is It Time to Step In?

There comes a time in the adult lives of children and their parents when it dawns on you that you might have to step in and be more active in your parents' lives, not as a child but as a caregiver. For every family, that time seems to come as a shock.

It's strange because we all see reports on television about the transition that we go through when the parent becomes the dependent one and the child becomes the one making decisions in the relationship. And the hardest part of that transition may be the first time you have to step in and "stage an intervention" because there is an area of life that your parent needs to let go of and you know they won't want to. So what are the signs that it's time to step in and suggest or directly take action to make that change in your parents lives?

When it comes to driving, your dad or mom's doctor will be able to help by determining if your parents are physically able to drive any more. When the senior citizen's eyesight dims to where he or she cannot distinguish details in the distance or when depth perception is poor so he might not be able to judge where the intersection is or if he is stopped at the stoplight or in the middle of the intersection, the time is right for Grandpa to give up the keys and let someone else do the driving.



The time to start the process of moving mom or dad out of their own home and into an assisted living facility may be more tricky to determine. As with driving, the senior citizen will mount every effort to appear to be competent to continue to live independently. That ability to live on our own, go where we want when we want to and take care of our own needs is so fundamental to who we are and to our self esteem that this transition from living on their own to living where everything is done for them is emotionally difficult to be sure.

So you as family members and as the caregiver for your parent need to watch for the signs that your parent's ability to take care of the house and of themselves living independently has come. Some of the symptoms of the need for change are...

- How is your mom or dad's health holding up? Are they eating well? Check the pantry and the refrigerator. Is it full of good things to eat, fresh foods and lots of supplies for cooking or is it sparse showing that going to the grocery store is a trial for your parent?
- Are your parents taking care of themselves? When you come over, do they look like they are sleeping ok? Are they groomed and clean and are their clothes clean and ready to use or is everything wrinkled because it's too hard to do the laundry and press shirts and blouses?
- How does the house look? Is it in good repair? Is it picked up and the kitchen clean with everything put away? If mom was always meticulous about her kitchen and now it's always a mess, she is having trouble keeping up with the housework.



- Does mom or dad stay home all the time? If they were normally outgoing and always up for a car trip, an outing to church or even just the grocery store or even an adventure, becoming a homebody signals that they don't want to go through the trouble of getting fixed up to go out.

Of all these symptoms, probably the one that signals the time to step in and take action is immediate if your elderly parent falls or goes to the floor and then cannot get up. If your mom or dad has to pass the night on the living room floor because they could not get up and had to sleep there until someone showed up to help them, that's an emergency situation that calls for immediate action.

Talk to your elderly parent about the risks of living alone, particularly in a scary thing like being unable to get up. By the time such a frightening incident happens, your parent may be suspecting the time to go somewhere where they can live with greater security and safety is here.



Making a difference *together*

There is something very self-absorbed about the caregiver to senior citizen relationship. By that, I mean that most if not all of the decisions you make, and subjects of concern focus either on the senior citizen and her needs or on the caregiver and the senior citizen and how you will work together to address her needs.

It's no wonder, then, when we think about what your elderly parent talked about all day, it tends to be one thing: himself! And by nature of their relationship, a conversation between caregiver and cared-for often circles around the needs of the one being cared for. As they age and their abilities slip away, their world slowly begins to downsize. The ability to drive, the ability to use the restroom, the ability to care for themselves... Their whole worldview shrinks just as yours is quite possibly getting larger.

But we know from raising children that having an ego-centric worldview can be unhealthy. It's easy to become a hypochondriac and overwhelmed when the world starts and stops at your doorstep.

Volunteer Activities to Do Together:

- Pick up trash on a slow walk
- Visit someone else in the retirement community that he or she knows is lonely and would enjoy company.
- Stuff envelopes or make phone calls for your church or a charity organization.
- Read to disadvantaged kids at the local library.
- Become a big brother or big sister and take a young person to a ball game or to the zoo.



Making a difference *together*

- Volunteer vacations.
- Join gardening clubs.
- Life story exercises.

Most cities have a volunteer coordination agency that can match up your physical abilities with volunteer opportunities. Once you get your elderly parent involved in doing something for others, don't be surprised if their enthusiasm takes off.

The great feeling of making a difference for others can literally turn his or her life around. Enjoy the chatter that's sure to come. You'll soon realize just how much your loved one's life has transformed when requests for more time to volunteer start pouring in. And that's a good thing.



Protect Your Peace of Mind With Advance Health Care Directives and Living Wills

Protect Your Peace of Mind with Advance Health Care Directives and Living Wills

Do you want to ensure that your loved one's wishes and beliefs are upheld with regard to medical care? Advance health care directives instruct others about your wishes concerning medical treatment, should they become unable to communicate those wishes themselves.

Documenting their plans can give them greater peace of mind and make decisions easier for everyone in potentially stressful situations. Here are some steps that will help you create these important documents.

1. Have your loved one's wishes and beliefs honored.

It's natural to feel uncomfortable thinking about physical incapacity and death, but it's comforting to know that you can exercise some control. Your loved one will feel more secure if you take every possible step to ensure that the medical care received is consistent with their personal values and beliefs.

2. Relieve your loved ones of unnecessary burdens.

It's difficult for your loved ones to know what you want unless you talk with them in advance. If your loved one is still able to, they can help family stay calm and united.



Protect Your Peace of Mind With Advance Health Care Directives and Living Wills

3. Help professional caregivers help you.

Doctors and nurses have demanding jobs. Make it easier for them to provide your loved one with the best care, even if that means referring out to a provider who better serves their needs.

4. Consider creating a Durable Power of Attorney.

This advance directive lets your loved one appoint another person who becomes their agent for making medical decisions if they are incapacitated. It's sometimes also called a Medical Power of Attorney. This power extends to all medical decisions unless you specify additional conditions.

5. Understand the limits of living wills.

A living will expresses your loved one's desires regarding life-sustaining or life-prolonging medical treatment. Practically speaking, their effectiveness is very limited, compared to a Durable Power of Attorney.

6. Decide on Do Not Resuscitate Orders.

One more directive is worth mentioning: Do Not Resuscitate Orders. These provide instructions to medical personnel if your loved one wishes to decline life-prolonging measures under certain circumstances.

Protect Your Peace of Mind With Advance Health Care Directives and Living Wills



7. Select a health care agent.

A health care agent can be your spouse or another close family member or friend. An agent may also be called a surrogate or attorney-in-fact. In any case, your loved one should select someone you trust with such a serious responsibility.

8. Get the correct forms.

Facilities that receive Medicare and Medicaid payments are required to provide you with written information. You can also obtain forms from local hospitals, community agencies, medical societies, geriatric care managers, and many individual attorneys and physicians.

9. Follow local laws.

You may want to seek legal advice to ensure you comply with requirements such as notarization and witness signatures.

10. Distribute copies to key individuals.

An advance directive is more likely to be enforced if you give copies to all the key individuals involved. These include your family, your primary care physician, and hospital personnel.

Protect Your Peace of Mind With Advance Health Care Directives and Living Wills



11. Talk with your doctor and family.

Your loved one's doctor can help you understand medical implications and terminology to clarify the directive. Most of all, talk with your family about these sensitive issues.

12. Keep your directive updated.

It's a good idea to review the directive regularly to ensure it's compatible with your current life circumstances. Experts recommend that everyone 18 or over prepare a directive, so a lot can change over the years.

Advance health care directives can be simple to draft, but involve many complex issues. Get the guidance you need from medical and legal experts so you and your family will be prepared even in difficult circumstances.

A soft-focus background image of pink cherry blossoms on thin branches against a light blue sky. The blossoms are in various stages of opening, with some showing yellow centers. A dark grey vertical bar is on the left side of the text area.

Health and Safety

“During the 24/7 grind of being a carer, it’s all too easy to forget the fact that the person you’re doing so much for is and is obliged to be, more resourceful than you in many respects.”

Naoki Higashida | Author



RECORD KEEPING

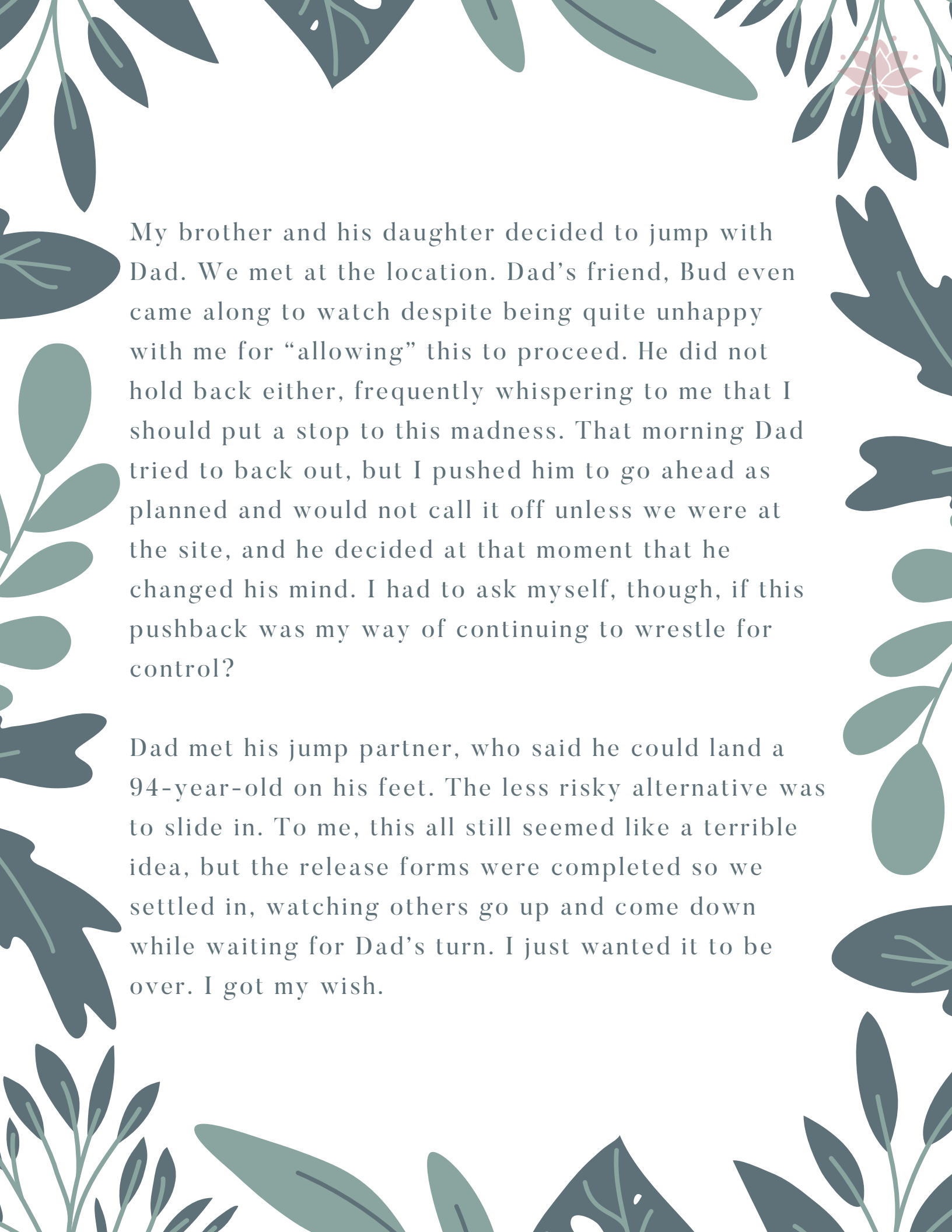




Caregiver Stories


I learned one of the biggest lessons in letting go of control and accepting that Dad was free to make his own decisions in the early years of caregiving. Dad wanted to jump out of a plane for his 94th birthday. He brought it up every day with an insistence that triggered my angst. I wasn't sure how serious he was, but it agitated me. He knew it and seemed amused by it. I would actively discourage him, deflect his attention elsewhere, but mostly I just resisted the whole idea. Dad brought it up with his primary care physician, who said, "Why not?" It was one of those rhetorical questions that I could have answered with a monologue, but in shock, I just stammered, "Why not!" I was finally relenting and asking myself, "What the heck was all the fuss?".

Back at home, I asked Dad if he wanted me to arrange the jump. His friends and family were not happy. They were where I had been. They had not endured the months of daily drama. I did my best to help them catch up and understand that this was the request of an adult with a reasonably sound mind, and we would appreciate their support.

A decorative border of various green leaves and a small pink flower is positioned around the text. The leaves are in different shades of green and have various shapes, some with detailed vein patterns. The pink flower is located in the top right corner.

My brother and his daughter decided to jump with Dad. We met at the location. Dad's friend, Bud even came along to watch despite being quite unhappy with me for "allowing" this to proceed. He did not hold back either, frequently whispering to me that I should put a stop to this madness. That morning Dad tried to back out, but I pushed him to go ahead as planned and would not call it off unless we were at the site, and he decided at that moment that he changed his mind. I had to ask myself, though, if this pushback was my way of continuing to wrestle for control?

Dad met his jump partner, who said he could land a 94-year-old on his feet. The less risky alternative was to slide in. To me, this all still seemed like a terrible idea, but the release forms were completed so we settled in, watching others go up and come down while waiting for Dad's turn. I just wanted it to be over. I got my wish.



The last group to land was a team of instructors who said that the winds had become too dangerous to continue. We were welcome to wait and see if things changed. Dad did not want to wait. We could reschedule or get a refund. Dad opted for a refund. His memory of the non-event doesn't include him trying to back out the morning of the jump. He only remembers that the wind foiled his plan, and that is not wrong.

I recalled this multi-month-long battle each time we butted heads in another clash of wills. Many “disagreeable” decisions that Dad had made could have had repercussions for all of us, and this goes along with the caregiving territory. Safety vs. independence can lead to the most epic battles and leave a path of destruction that takes ages to clear. I found it was better to shed the battle armor, even when your parent wants to jump out of a plane.

Theresa Wilbanks



RECORD-KEEPING CHECKLIST



Record keeping for all of your legal and financial documents.

☐

Location of Important Documents

☐

Location of Will

☐

Bank Accounts

☐

Attorney

☐

Monthly Bills

☐

Certified Financial Planner or Other Investment Advisor

☐

Investment and Accounting Documents

☐

Insurance Information

☐

Passwords

☐

Bill Tracker



RECORD-KEEPING CHECKLIST



Record keeping for all of your medical and health documents.

☐

Medications/Allergies

☐

Important Test Results

☐

Pharmacy

☐

Physicians and Specialists

☐

Health Log

☐

Chronic Conditions

☐

Medical Information

☐

Physical Aids Needed
(hearing, walker, etc.)

☐

Medical History/Significant
Events

☐

Fitness Level



RECORD-KEEPING CHECKLIST



Record keeping for all of your emergency information documents.

☐

Person's with POA for Health
Care and Financial

☐

Local Emergency Services

☐

Important Personal Contacts

☐

Medical Consent Form

☐

Baseline Behavior Tracking

☐

Pet Information

☐

Medications

☐

Important Password
Information

☐

Location of First Aid Supplies

☐

Copies of Birth Certificates,
Adoptions, Marriages



RECORD-KEEPING CHECKLIST



Record keeping for all of your care provider documents.

☐

Vehicle Maintenance Schedule

☐

Daily Eating Patterns

☐

About the Elder/Habits, Likes,
Lifestyle

☐

Triggers for Undesirable
Emotions and Behaviors

☐

Self-Care Abilities and Needs

☐

Pain Scale

☐

Daily Activities

☐

Self-Care Check In

☐

Location of Receipts

☐

Housekeeping Lists &
Schedules

CAREGIVER'S CHECKLIST



Patient Name: _____ Date: _____

Personal Care

Activities & Exercises

.....

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Physical Therapy

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Housekeeping

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

☐ _____

Caregiver

Name:

Signature:

Activities & Exercises

Activity

Duration

Meals

Meal	Time	Amount

Medicines

Medicine	Time	Dosage

Bathroom

Supplies

<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	

Notes:

[illegible]

WEEK 2

[illegible]

WEEK 3

[illegible]

WEEK 4

[illegible]



FAMILY DYNAMICS





That Thing We Don't Talk About

Have you ever heard the phrase, “The 200-pound gorilla in the room”? It’s a phrase that refers to a topic that nobody talks about, but it so dominates everybody’s thoughts. Everyone knows the gorilla is there, but nobody gets anxious because, after all, you don’t want to upset the gorilla.

There is a 200-pound gorilla in the room in any time being spent with a senior citizen. It is a topic that is blatantly pertinent to anyone in their golden years, but it is a topic that nobody talks about either because it’s too upsetting, or nobody knows how to talk about it. But it is a topic that weighs on the mind of your senior citizen mom and dad virtually every day. The 200-pound gorilla in the room is death and the end-of-life issues that are ahead for every senior citizen at some point or another.

As the caregiver for your elderly mom or dad, you should be aware how heavily the topic we don’t talk about weighs on the minds of your parents. If you have lost one parent, the surviving spouse is even more aware of the issue. But there are good reasons to remove the stigma from talking about end-of-life issues with your elderly parent. That is because there are numerous ends of life issues about which you must reach some decisions before that time comes along including:



- The condition of the Will.
- Do Not Resuscitate and other advance directive document decisions to give to end of life medical personnel.
- A review of insurance and the location of other financial documents that you, the executor of the Will or the person who has power of attorney will resolve.
- Any desires the senior citizen might have about funeral arrangements.

To be able to discuss the end of life and issues related to death, you will have to be at a point emotionally that you can deal with the topic yourself. Many of us bury our thoughts of death in a mental trick we play that seems like we think we will not have to go through this part of life. We do that perhaps because we prefer to think about life or because we are uncomfortable about discussion of the afterlife and religious ideas.

So, to get ready to be able to be a good caregiver and counselor to your aging mom or dad, you should sit down and get some peace and resolution about the topic yourself. If that means confronting your religious anxieties, well, that is part of adulthood and those who are depending on you including your aging parents and your children may be looking to you for some answers in that area. It will take some courage but face those issues so you can be ready to help your parents face them too.



If you have a religious faith and your parents share that outlook, this is the time to review the afterlife assurances that come from your religious upbringing. By spending time with your mom or dad reviewing the doctrines of heaven and the comfort those religious texts bring, you can give them renewed hope and peace about the coming of death because they will know that passing from this life is not the end.

Don't let the 200-pound gorilla stay in the room. Confront the issue of death with your aging parent or parents and do so with compassion and kindness. If you do, you will help your parent reach a place of peace and acceptance about what is going to happen that will benefit them for the whole of their golden years remaining on this earth.



10 TIPS ON HOLDING A FAMILY MEETING

1. Find a time that works for everyone. Best to do in person, but if not possible, try a zoom or other live video call.
2. Prepare an agenda or list of topics to be discussed ahead of time and share.
3. Avoid making anyone feel like it's an ambush.
4. Come with an open mind, leaving behind any old sibling or parental issues.
5. Set the intention for the meeting and desired outcome.
6. Come prepared with questions and curiosity, as opposed to opinions.
7. If you have research on things such as assisted living, in home care, or financial planning, bring that with you.
8. Set a time limit, don't make this about everything on your list. You may need to do a follow up meeting. Take breaks.
9. If the conversation gets tense or people shut down, either move on to a lighter topic, address the emotions in a calm way or reconvene.
10. Listen, don't judge, or form opinions or make assumptions.



Listening Self-Assessment

To help you start to be more aware of your listening habits, complete the following listening self-evaluation. Answer each question thoughtfully and after you have answered all the questions turn to page 3 to score your self assessment.

Listening Habit	Almost Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
1. Tune out people who say something you don't agree with or don't want to hear?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Concentrate on what is being said even if you're not really interested?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Assume you know what the talker is going to say and stop listening?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Repeat in your own words what the talker has just said?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Listen to the other person's viewpoint, even if it differs from yours?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Learn something from each person you meet, even if it is ever so slight?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Find out what words mean when they are used in ways not familiar to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Form a rebuttal in your head while the speaker is talking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Give the appearance of listening when you aren't?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Daydream while the speaker is talking?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Listen to the whole message, what the talker is saying verbally and nonverbally?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



A Practical Guide for Siblings Who Share Caregiving for Aging Parents

When you're caring for your aging parents, you can use all the help your siblings have to offer. Your brothers and sisters can provide a tremendous amount of support, but there may also be challenging family dynamics to manage.

Learn how to lighten your load and draw your family closer together by sharing caregiving responsibilities with your siblings. Try these strategies for working together as a team.

Managing Logistics

1. Hold family meetings. Even if your family is spread out over long distances, try to gather in one place. Talking about how to care for your parents before an emergency arises allows you to approach the subject with a clearer head.
2. Assign roles. It's easy to drift into old patterns. The child who was labeled the responsible one growing up may automatically assume much of the decision making. Instead, each of you can look at your current capabilities and contribute accordingly.
3. Consult professionals. Ask family physicians, pastors, and social workers to help you find the resources you need. Engage a geriatric care manager to coordinate the process.



4. Share information. Talk with your brothers and sisters about what you learn as you research issues about aging and caregiving. Give each other updates after you call or visit your parents. Avoid making assumptions, assigning blame or guilt.

5. Maintain records. You may need to deal with some complicated medical, financial, and legal arrangements. Proper documentation can prevent misunderstandings and help you comply with applicable laws.

6. Encourage independence. It's important to remember that your mother and father want to maintain their independence for as long as possible. Look for ways to assist them that support their dignity.

Installing safety bars around the shower is one adjustment that helps them to care for themselves. Look at other ways to help them be safe in their home. This can be a good family project.

7. Ask for help. Call on each other when you need a hand. Be tactful and specific. You can let your brothers and sisters know that you need them to cover part of a medical bill without trying to make anyone feel guilty.



Managing Emotions

1. Think about aging. Watching your parents grow older may trigger uncomfortable thoughts about aging and death. Join a support group or read spiritual material that can help you to understand your feelings.
2. Sort out rivalries. You may find yourself competing for your mother's attention or reliving old memories about how your father took your brother camping without you. Decide to let go of past conflicts or talk them over with your siblings.
3. Respect differences. Each member of the family may have different opinions about the situation and unique ways of contributing. Accept that your sister may be more willing to pay for a gardener than to come over on weekends to do the yard work herself.
4. Establish realistic goals. It can be difficult to juggle caregiving on top of all your other responsibilities. If you're becoming overwhelmed, concentrate on the essentials.



Managing Emotions

5. Express compassion. This can be a challenging time for the whole family. Be gentle with yourself and your siblings as you take on new tasks. Let your parents know how grateful you are for the love and guidance they've provided.
6. Take a break. Taking time off will help you to sustain your strength. Ask your parents if they'd like to take senior aerobics classes at the local gym so you can spend Saturday morning with your kids.

As the average lifespan increases, you may be able to enjoy your parents' company for many more years than you expected. Advance planning and skillful communications will help you and your siblings to collaborate on caregiving to make this stage in your family's life more joyful and meaningful.



CONVERSATION STARTERS

These questions can help you hold those awkward conversations with your loved ones.

- I have something I'd like to discuss with you that I think will help us plan for the next few years.
- I'd like to talk about _____ with you, but first I'd like to get your thoughts.
- I need you to help me so when you need my help, I can do it.
- I think we have different perceptions about _____. I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.
- I'd like to know what your wishes are should you not be able to choose for yourself.
- I'd like to know what your wishes are should you need care and who you would like to do that with you.
- I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about _____. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.
- I have a friend whose parents had a medical crisis and she had to go help with everything from paying bills to arranging for in-home care and rehab. Because I am not so close, I'd like to talk about making a plan in case something like this happens.
- What are your concerns about aging and how can I support you?



CONVERSATION STARTERS

Write some of your own conversational openings below.

A soft-focus background of pink cherry blossoms on thin branches against a light blue sky. The blossoms are in various stages of opening, with some showing yellow centers.

Family Dynamics

“The day the roles reverse is foreign. It’s a clumsy dance of love and responsibility, not wanting to cross any lines of respect. It’s honoring this person who gave their life to you—not to mention literally gave you life—and taking their fragile body in your hands like a newborn, tending to their every need.”

Lisa Goich-Andreadis | Author



GETTING HELP & GETTING PAID

the doorman at work, and other connections would be included here.

[illegible]

This should be a guide to help you reach out to team members.

[illegible]

Caregiving Takes a Team



This short assessment can help you to think through some potential situations so you can be prepared.

1. You have a family member living in another state. How do you make them a part of your team and why? What role can they hold in the team?

2. What other family members can you include and what role might they have?

3. Your loved one has had to go to the hospital. Who do you add to your team now and why? Who on your team do you reach out to for help, and what skills, knowledge, experience will they offer?

4. How do you communicate with hospital staff? How do you assess the “professional culture clash” of various experts to get the best information?

Caregiving Takes a Team



5. You have made the decision to move your loved one to a care facility (assisted, nursing, semi-independent living). Who is on this team? How do you lead this move for your team? How do you communicate this decision and who is included in it?

6. You can have different teams for different situations. What sort of situations might cause a change in your team? How would you shift your leadership and communications? Who will be on the shifting teams?

For each of these programs, check your state or county as benefits and eligibility may vary.



VA Benefits

<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/learn/healthcare>
<https://www.va.gov/health-care/family-caregiver-benefits/>
<https://www.va.gov/health-care/about-va-health-benefits/long-term-care/>
<https://www.va.gov/pension/>
<https://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/news/feature/caregivers2021.cfm>
https://www.hsrdr.research.va.gov/research_topics/caregiving.cfm

Medicaid

<https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/home-community-based-services/index.html>
<https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/home-community-based-services/home-community-based-services-authorities/home-community-based-services-1915c/index.html>

Applied Self-Direction

<https://www.appliedselfdirection.com/>

Social Security

<https://www.appliedselfdirection.com/>



Database of Benefits Programs for Seniors

<https://benefitscheckup.org/>

Area Agencies on Aging

https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/About/Aging_Network/AAA.aspx

Elder Law

<https://www.naela.org//>

Cost of Elder Care

<https://www.genworth.com/aging-and-you/finances/cost-of-care.html>

Support for Outside Caregivers for Respite

<https://acl.gov/programs/support-caregivers/national-family-caregiver-support-program>

National Care Planning Council

www.longtermcarelink.net

Long Term Care Personal Support Services Agreement Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Family Independence (2011)

www.maine.gov/dhhs/ofid/documents/LTC-Personal-Support-Agreement.pdf

A background image of pink cherry blossoms on thin branches, with a soft, out-of-focus effect. The blossoms are in various stages of opening, showing delicate petals and yellow centers. The overall tone is light and airy, with a hint of blue sky visible through the branches.

Getting Help & Getting Paid —

“My caregiver mantra is to remember: the only control you have is over the changes you choose to make.”

Nancy L. Kriseman | Social Worker



Caregiver Stories

After the death of my father, my mother struggled with anxiety and depression and really started going downhill. She was not eating well and sleeping at odd hours, suffering from insomnia and losing weight, crying easily and constantly anxious. My brothers and I were very worried about her and very stressed trying to help her, to make her eat, to encourage her to sleep at night and not all day long, and to keep her spirits up. We were failing, and we could see that she was failing, too, and was not going to last long. I felt sure she was going to continue her downhill spiral and die.

My brothers and I had phone conference after phone conference, trying to figure out what else to do. We were at our wit's end. Then she said one day that she wanted to check out assisted living. We were so happy with this development and jumped on the idea, getting her on the waiting list and scheduling a tour and having many phone conferences about how to proceed.

Jan Hencke



Caregiver Stories

I took her for a tour, where we visited with a sales person. We were both very impressed with the facility and the friendliness of the staff and residents alike. The apartments were very homey and comfortable. She agreed to move there and luckily only had to wait about a month before moving.

Assisted living has saved her life, quite literally, and has relieved the tremendous pressure on my brothers and me. She is happy and healthy, and we are all delighted to have our mother back and to be able to enjoy her without worrying constantly about her daily wellbeing. What a gift!

Jan Hencke



SELF-CARE



Caregiving Thoughts



I willingly took on the role as caregiver for my elderly mother after my father died. It was not a role I had ever planned on having. My parents had moved to a very nice retirement community one state away. I assumed all was taken care of for their elder years. Then my father became terminally ill and went into skilled care. After 64 years of marriage, my mother was in a fragile state. After spending a year going to check on her once a month, I moved her to an assisted living facility 25 minutes from my home.

Caregiving is tedious: paperwork, prescriptions, doctor appointments, etc. 01

02 Caregiving is about cultivating relationships: with physical therapists, CNA's, nurses, administrators, doctors, activities directors, nutritionists, housekeepers, and other residents.

No one else cares about caregiving the way you do. 03

04 You are a caregiver when your senior parent needs you. You may just be saying to yourself, it's my duty and responsibility, I'm helping out, and now you are a Caregiver.

Caregiving does not depend on where your loved one lives. It is not location specific. 05

06 Caregiving is as much about you as them. Don't forget that!

Caregiving Thoughts



Asking for what you need is a sign of strength, good mental health and positive wellbeing. 07

08 It's ok to take a break.

Caregiving is love, heartbreak, sadness, smiles, loss, and moments in the sun. 09

10 Caregiving is not a duty; it is a gift you will realize much later.

Caregiving is often not something you choose. 11

12 Caregiving is a moment in time.

“Compassion automatically invites you to relate with people because you no longer regard people as a drain on your energy.”

Chogyam Trungpa

Caregiving 101



The day we drove here to VA where she was to live, was a day that changed my life. My mother called me “my daughter/my mother.” I did not have a clue what I was doing. I only knew that I needed to take care of her. I told her we would be “partners” in making decisions about what she needed. As she settled into her new life, those decisions became more and more all on me. As our roles shifted, I became more comfortable making decisions for her. My journey with her lasted 6 years.

Navigating the world of the elderly and their care is like being in a jungle without a map. I was constantly stressed, worried, and tired. And, frustrated, as she gave up more and more to me to take care of for her. Here are a few things I learned that I hope will help you on your journey.

Of all of these I would say, Be Involved!

Always have your cell phone with you. Yes, you are on call 24/7!

13

14 You will miss work. You will give up some social activities, you will be tired, you will give up some of the things you love doing.

Accept that your roles will be reversed and preserve their dignity and independence as much as you can.

15

16 Make sure you have Power of Attorney for your parent’s healthcare and that the document is on file at their living facility, Dr.’s office, and local hospital.

Caregiving 101



17 Old people can be stubborn. You will sometimes have to just make a decision and explain later. (One doctor's visit my mother did not want to go, so I bribed her with lunch out.)

Make sure they have an Advanced Directive and DNR if they so desire. 18

19 Be prepared for the unexpected.

Know that things will always take longer and that a quick visit is not ever going to happen. You can't just "drop by". 20

21 Don't try to do everything! If there are services like laundry provided and included, then use them.

If using services like laundry, be aware that it is done in HOT water, industrial machines and things will get lost, stolen and shrunk. So, if there are nice things, take care of them yourself. 22

23 Make sure you know what is in your parent's room. Things do go missing and sometimes it is just a lapse in memory.

Don't try to correct a false memory. Learn to live in their moment. 24

Caregiving 101



25 Make sure to make time and be present. (One day I went to see my Mother and it was late in the day. I had worked all day and thought I would just check on her and come back the next day when I had more time. The activities person came to say there was going to be some piano and violin music, so we went. I stayed longer than wanted but we both enjoyed the music.)

Laugh! Sometimes the things that can frustrate you can be turned into a laughable moment. 26

27 Talk with the dietician. Elderly people don't eat very well, and you will have to make adjustments. It's ok if they want dessert for dinner!

It is ok to sit in the parking lot thinking you don't want to go into the building. 28

29 It is ok to take a day for yourself.

Have a good cry! 30

31 Request that the first thing staff tell you when they call is that your loved one is okay (if it is true). You likely won't be able to hear anything else until you hear those words.

Caregiving 101



Every time your caller ID shows the number for your parent, your heart will skip a beat and your stomach will fall. It doesn't go away; it's part of the process. 32

33 Don't expect people who haven't gone through this process to understand. Their eyes are apt to glaze over if you go on at length. If you just need someone to talk to so you can unload, be very clear about those needs.

Understand what insurance covers -- and more importantly, what it does. Rules change frequently. 34

35 Be pleasant, yet firm with healthcare staff. Ask lots of questions! Be there!

Know the baseline behavior and capabilities of your parent. 36

37 Emergency rooms and hospitals are not good places for recovery for the elderly. Do everything you can to be present.



Consider the healthcare staff at the assisted living facility your best allies. These people are your parent's friends. They will come to love them. Know their names, the names of their kids, what they do after work. Take the staff gifts and goodies. 38

39 Technology can be your friend. Buy a noise amplifying telephone, Alexa, computer. Some facilities provide computers and classes and many of the elderly can use them.

The older your parent gets, the smaller their world becomes. Old people can seem very self-centered and clingy, their world is very small. 40

41 Find your own personal space for quiet and decompressing time.

If siblings won't help, find others who will. 42

Self Care for Caregivers Support Ideas



- Find something positive.

Little things like saying thank you to someone for a small gesture such as holding the door, expressing your appreciation to a spouse/partner, coworker or child and writing thank you notes for gifts can make a difference for both you and the other person. Write down several things each day that you are grateful for or appreciate. It helps to identify three things at the end of the day that went well or left you feeling gratitude. (Included sheets)

- Find ways to relax.

Rest and relaxation are critical to managing stress and minimizing anxiety. Those who find it difficult to let go and relax may find yoga, breathing or stress management classes helpful. Regulating your breath has a calming effect on the mind and loosens tension held in the body. Sitting quietly at home for 5-10 minutes each day to simply be aware of your breathing can enhance relaxation. Try a meditation app such as Insight Timer, or HeadSpace.

Self Care for Caregivers Support Ideas



- Move around every day.

Exercise and movement can include gardening, playing with your pets, dancing, stretching, etc. Movement improves cardiovascular health, flexibility, strengthens muscles and improves mental health. Exercise also oxygenates your body and brain providing clearer thinking and creativity. So many exercise programs are now available virtually, you can do it anytime.

- Engage in good conversation.

Spending time with good friends, even online or on the phone, and engaging in stimulating conversation with a neighbor is good for the soul (mind and body). When we share our thoughts with others, we establish an emotional and mental connection that can be refreshing and heartwarming.

Self Care for Caregivers Support Ideas



- Get enough sleep.

Good sleep hygiene involves cutting out caffeine after 5 PM, turning off electronics two hours before bedtime, eating your last meal two or more hours before you turn in for the night, going to bed early enough to get 6-8 hours of sleep, darkening the room you sleep in. It is helpful to create a sleep habit of going to bed and arising at the same time everyday.

- Keep up with your medical needs.

Annual physicals, biannual dental checkups and cleanings, mammograms, pap smears, etc. are proactive habits for good health. Many advocate an annual mental health screening, which may be part of the annual physical at some point.

Self Care for Caregivers Support Ideas



- Treat yourself regularly.

See a movie, eat dinner at a restaurant, sit in the park, get a massage, get a manicure/pedicure, buy yourself flowers – whatever you enjoy – do that for yourself. These are also ways to find respite from your duties.

- Engage in a hobby.

Build an airplane, play cards, get lost in good books, take up sewing or knitting – anything that relaxes you – do that.

- Eat healthily.

It's easy to stop and grab fast food when you are short on time or skip a meal. With so many fast casual restaurants (Panera, Chipotle, Zoe's, etc) it's easier to stop and grab a healthy meal. Or, cook something that will give you meals for a couple of days, like a good soup, or pot roast or roast a chicken and then make chicken salad. Keep fresh fruits handy. If your parent is in a care facility, take lunch to have with them.

(Adapted from Good Mental Health: Self Care)



Taking Care of Yourself is Part of the Job

The job of becoming the primary caregiver for your aging parent is universally recognized as one of the most difficult transitions we will go through. To start with, it's hard to go through the reversal of parent and child. All your life, mom or dad were the strong ones. They were the ones you ran to for help and who were always there to tell you, "It's ok. Everything will be alright."

But now as your loved one ages and you have to witness their demise mentally and physically, you realize that everything may not be alright, especially if your loved one is going through a slow decline of a terminal illness. When the only outcome of what you are dealing with in your parent's life is death, that makes it tough to stay upbeat, creative and proactive about how to handle life's daily challenges.

The task of caring for an elderly parent is overwhelming. You have concerns about their finances, their medications, the progress of their disease if they are battling something terminal, their mental state, their diet and their emotional state as well. It's easy to begin to "hover" your senior citizen in an emotional attempt to block any more harm coming to him or her. This is a parenting instinct and one that your dad and mom probably won't resist because they want to be cared for.



Keeping It At Arm's Length

Sometimes when you have a very consuming problem, it can so take over your life that you forget the rest of life's responsibilities and relationships. That is certainly a danger that caregivers are faced with. It is easy to become so wrapped up in the demands of being a good caregiver for your aging parent or loved one that the rest of the world seems to disappear.

This is never a healthy way to take on the challenge of caregiving. Not only would it be terrible for your family, job, and friends to see you vanish into the task of care giving and never be available for anyone else, it's also a bad idea for both you and your elderly parent for you to obsess that much.

This is a formula for caregiver burnout which can lead to medical problems, loss of sleep, eating disorders and maybe even a nervous breakdown. So, the healthy approach to being a caregiver is to keep the demands of that part of your life at arm's length so you can establish a balance between your life with your senior citizen and work and family life as well.



One way to begin laying the groundwork for keeping that balance in right ratio to your life is to have an honest talk about the issue with your elderly parent who you are caring for. Sometimes the force draws you in to wanting to give it all to the task of caregiving. But if you talk about it in a rational way when both of you are rested and thinking calmly, your parent will see that she doesn't want you to give up your life to be her caregiver exclusively. Oh sure, sometimes when she is sad or lonely, she says things like “I wish you could stay here all the time.” But that is not rational, and she knows you need to be a mature adult and take care of your job responsibilities and your spouse and children as well.

Another person you should have a frank discussion about the demands you are going through as a caregiver for your elderly parent is your boss at work. In the modern world, businesses need hard working and well-trained individuals like you. And this is a time when a lot of baby boomers are becoming “sandwich generation” people and have that additional demand of caring for an elderly parent along with home and work responsibilities. So, your work will want to work with you to get through this rather than lose you entirely.



Your employer may be able to work with you to give you some flexibility so that if you must have time during the day to take your parent to the doctors or attend to some other need in your parents' life, you can make up the time or attend to your work in other ways. Many employers will even allow you to take work home with you and split your time between the office, your family life and your caregiving responsibilities. There are even extended leave programs that some larger companies have where you can take a few months off to care for your parent during a time when you must give her all your time. This is invaluable during time when you are moving her from her own home to the assisted living center or if your parent is terminally ill and you need to be constantly available in those last months of her life.

Above all, solicit the support and love of your spouse and kids. If mommy must be over at grandmas every evening for a few hours, it may call on the dad and kids to whip up some macaroni and cheese or just get in the car and go get some fast food to cut mom some slack to take care of the needs of that aging senior citizen. Your family, your work associates and your friends can handle giving you that time if you are open with them about what is going on and they see the need. But do make time to see them and be with others so the job of being a caregiver doesn't overwhelm you. You need them as much or more than they need you during this time.

Caregiver Coping Skills Worksheet



Use this log to monitor how well your coping skills work. Rate the level of success 1 – 5, with 1 as the least successful and 5 being the most successful. Record any after thoughts about what might have worked better or why a specific skill worked/didn't work at that time.

Feeling	Coping Skills Used	Success	After Thoughts
<i>Loneliness</i>	<i>Call Manuela & invited her out</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>I really need to remember to rely on the people closest to me more.</i>

The Coping Question Worksheet



Life can be overwhelming at times, especially when things are tough. Here are some suggestions for how to best cope.

1. Identify the Challenge. Be specific about different aspects of the problem.

2. Reflect On Previous Successes. What have you done in the past to cope with similar problems? (What did you do? Who did you call? Where did you go? What changes did you make to accommodate your needs?)

3. Consider Your Resources. What resources are available within your network to help you with this problem? Think of formal and informational resources (social services agencies, temporary agencies, day care centers, schools, etc.)

4. Remember Your Inner Resilience. List personal qualities of resilience that you possess to bounce back from difficulties in life.



Afterthoughts:



Caregiver Stress Assessment

Check any of the following that apply. You...

- ☐ Feel that you have to do it all yourself.
- ☐ Feel that you should be doing more.
- ☐ Spend less (or no) time with family and friends.
- ☐ No longer engage in activities that you once enjoyed.
- ☐ Worry about the person you care for – their safety and well-being.
- ☐ Not sleeping or eating well.
- ☐ Feel anxious about money.
- ☐ Worry about making the right health care decisions.
- ☐ Minimize the impact of the disease, old age
- ☐ Deny how the disease, old age affects you and your family.
- ☐ Feel a sense of loss for the relationship you once had with the person you care for.



Check any of the following that apply. You...

- ☐ Feel frustrated or angry when caring for your loved one.
- ☐ Experience feelings of resentment towards others.
- ☐ Are beginning to experience mental or physical health effects.

(Adapted from Alzheimer's Association Caregiver Stress Check)

Scoring

Count the check marks.

1-3: You are coping well – keep it up.

4-8: You are in dangerous territory – let's talk.

9 and above: You and your loved one are at risk – seek professional help.

A background image of pink cherry blossoms in bloom, with some branches and buds visible. The text is overlaid on a dark grey rectangular area on the left side of the image.

Self Care

“Compassion automatically invites you to relate with people because you no longer regard people as a drain on your energy.”

Chogyam Trungpa | Meditation Master
