

The Caregiver's Guide

Wisdom, insight and support for caregivers | Tips and resources for first-time caregivers

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Atria SENIOR LIVING

Tips and Resources for First-Time Caregivers

As families age, roles reverse, and people often find themselves playing the part of caregiver for an older parent or family member. This can happen slowly and in phases, or suddenly due to an accident or onset of disease. No matter the circumstance, becoming a parent's caregiver can be difficult for everyone involved.

When possible, it's a good idea to try and anticipate the needs your parent may have as they age, which can begin with driving them to and from errands or doctor's appointments and evolve into helping with meals, housekeeping or finances. Throughout this guide, you'll find helpful tips and advice for first-time caregivers.



Have an earnest conversation

Planning care for your parent can be difficult to talk about, but it's a necessary conversation. The sooner you begin discussing what the future could look like, the smoother the process will be. If you wait until decisions are imminent, stress and urgency can make it harder to evaluate options, and those options may be more limited.

Broach the topic gently

No one likes to have a difficult discussion they aren't prepared for; it can put people on the defensive. Look for a natural opening to bring up the subject with your parent. For example, if your parent mentions joint pain, you can ask if the pain is impacting their ability to get around the house.

Be persistent but patient

Older adults are often hesitant to leave the home they've made for themselves. They may have been there for decades, forging cherished memories of raising children, entertaining friends and family, or investing time and resources into the property. It will likely take several conversations to help your parent understand that they need assistance. Forcing the issue can create a combative situation, making matters more challenging.



Don't be afraid to talk about money

Figuring out finances is an unavoidable topic. You'll need to take stock of any savings or assets your parent may have, as well as determine how much you and other family members are able to contribute. The earlier you have this discussion, the more time there will be to save.

Get others' opinions

Your assessment of the situation isn't the only point of view. It's crucial to talk

to siblings and other family members, too. Consider asking your parent's doctors, other family members and trusted friends what they think is best.

Listen

Your parent deserves to have their opinion heard. The opportunity to express one's preferences and concerns can be empowering, so make sure your parent is involved in as many decisions as possible.

Know what to expect

Knowledge is power. Gather as much information as you can so you can make informed decisions and be prepared for the future.

Research the disease or disability

If your parent has received a diagnosis, knowing how the disease or disability may progress can help you anticipate what additional care or resources may be necessary down the line. This can help you make decisions now that could potentially make things easier later. Learn about any medications – the purpose of each, side effects and dosage.



Forgetting to take medication is a common sign of aging, so be prepared to help.

Search for resources

Be thorough in your research when considering care options. There are plenty of resources online that can help. If you

know anyone who has navigated a similar situation, ask for their advice. Explore all your options, such as day programs for older adults and in-home care that could help your parent prepare for a transition to assisted living or memory care should either become necessary.

Assemble a care team

Many hands make light work. Don't be afraid to ask for help from family, neighbors, clergy or care professionals.

Designate roles

Everyone can play a meaningful and helpful part in caring for your parent. Even a simple phone call to keep loneliness at bay can make a big impact. Neighbors and relatives may be able to assist with transportation or attend any doctor's appointments. Those who live farther away may be

able to contribute financially or help research and gather useful information.

Assign a leader

This shouldn't be someone who is responsible or in charge of making executive decisions, but rather a person who will task themselves with making sure issues get addressed in a timely manner, ensuring there are no gaps in care, anticipating future needs that may arise, and keeping the care team on the same page.

Consider a mediator

Even when people have the best intentions, it can be hard to agree on the often emotionally charged decisions that need to be made. Family dynamics come into play, and personalities may clash. An unbiased, third-party mediator can help iron things out so everyone can focus on what's really important: making sure your parent receives the care they need.

Develop a clear care plan

When expectations and responsibilities aren't conveyed directly, things often slip through the cracks. Everyone needs to understand what their role is and how it fits into your parent's care plan.

Delegate to others

No one should feel they have to care for their parent alone, especially first-time caregivers. Seek the support of siblings and other family members, and divvy up tasks among the care team according to their proximity and abilities.

Be honest with yourself

Ask yourself what you are truly able and willing to do or



contribute, and ask others to do the same. Taking on more than you can handle can lead to stress and fatigue.

Put it in writing

Write up a summary of care needs and persons assigned to meet them. This may change as life circumstances evolve, perhaps with a cross-country move or the birth

of a child, but having something in writing will make it easy to keep track of who is doing what – and to reconfigure responsibilities if and when that becomes necessary.

Facilitate communication

Use technology to your advantage. Consider a dedicated group chat, email chain or Facebook family group to keep everyone in the loop.

Care for your parent

Once you've educated yourself, created a care team and outlined a clear plan, you'll be best prepared to provide care for your parent.

Keep them safe

First and foremost, you need to ensure your parent is safe, especially if they are living at home by themselves. That could mean making accessibility modifications to the home, incorporating an emergency alert system, providing transportation or arranging daily wellness check visits.

Be an advocate

Attend doctor's appointments with your parent and ask questions. Medical terminology can be daunting, and information overload is real. Gaps in care or poor information sharing among providers can also be roadblocks to care. Having an informed advocate will ensure all the moving parts work together.

Seek out training

As a first-time caregiver, you will be asked to perform duties you may have never encountered

before. Don't be afraid to seek out training on how to do things like dress a wound, administer medication or use specialized medical equipment.

Stay organized

This is great advice for any undertaking, but it is especially important for first-time caregivers. Keep records of doctors, healthcare providers and medications, as well as information on insurance policies, government assistance programs and other pertinent details.

Care for your yourself

You are important, too. It's vitally important that you make sure your needs are met so you can continue providing the best care for your parent.

Understand the total cost

Becoming a caregiver is more than a financial commitment. Understand that it will also require time and emotional investment. Be realistic with yourself about how multiple facets of your life may need to be adjusted.

Work with your employer

If possible, ask your employer if they can accommodate a more flexible schedule that allows you to provide care.

Show yourself compassion

You are only human. Treat yourself with kindness and consider finding a support group for caregivers, either online or in your area.



Arrange for short-term care

Also known as respite care, short-term care can be arranged for an afternoon or several days to provide relief for caregivers.

Make time for yourself

Helping others can be very

demanding, both physically and emotionally. Make sure you're getting enough sleep, eating well and exercising. If things become overwhelming, consider talking to a therapist.

Care That Fosters Confidence

At Atria, we believe care is an important, yet discreet, part of life that empowers older adults to stay active, grow and engage in what brings purpose and joy. We offer tiered care ranging from assistance with medication

and personal grooming to round-the-clock memory care.

As an industry leader, we're happy to share our expertise and offer any support we can – even if the support you need is from

someone other than us. We can call on our trusted relationships with other senior living providers and resources to put you in touch with the best solution for you and your family.

Quick Guide: Vital Information for First-Time Caregivers

Use this document to create a practical, thoughtful approach to caring for your parent or older family member. As you work through this guide, keep in mind that it is not exhaustive and should be used as a starting point.

Discuss care with your parent

The opportunity to express one's preferences and concerns regarding their care can be empowering, so make sure your parent is involved in as many decisions as possible.

| Talking points | Key takeaways |
|----------------|---------------|
| | |
| | |
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| | |

Don't be afraid to talk about money

Broach the topic of finances carefully. When the time is right, take stock of any savings or assets your parent may have, and determine how much you and other family members are able to contribute to care costs. The earlier you have this discussion, the more time there will be to save for services or a transition to a senior living community.

| Assets | Account info | Balance |
|----------------------------------|--------------|---------|
| Checking account | | |
| Investment account | | |
| Retirement account - IRA, 401(k) | | |
| Savings account | | |
| Other | | |

| Debts | Account info | Balance |
|------------------|--------------|---------|
| Car loan | | |
| Credit card debt | | |
| Mortgage | | |
| Other | | |
| Other | | |

| Future expenses | Estimated cost |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Home safety modifications | |
| Assistive equipment | |
| Medical bills, co-pays | |
| In-home care | |
| Legal/financial fees | |
| Assisted living* | |
| Other | |

| Current monthly expenses* | Estimated cost |
|--|----------------|
| Care services | |
| Fitness and social opportunities | |
| Groceries | |
| Home or renters' insurance | |
| Housekeeping and home repairs | |
| Laundry service | |
| Lawn care and landscaping | |
| Mortgage or rent | |
| Personal appearance services (hair, nails, etc.) | |
| Property insurance and taxes | |
| Transportation | |
| Utilities | |
| 24-hour security | |
| Other | |

*Comparing in-home care costs to those associated with a move to an assisted living community is a key consideration.

Know what to expect

Obtain a general understanding of any conditions, disabilities or degenerative illnesses your parent may have that may possibly impact the level of care they require. Ask their doctor for as much information as you can so that you can make informed decisions and be prepared for the future.

| Notes |
|-------|
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| |

Learn about medications

Familiarize yourself with any medications your parent is taking, the purpose of each and any side effects. Forgetting to take medication is a common sign of aging, so be prepared to help.

| Medication name | Dosage | Instructions |
|-----------------|--------|--------------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

Locate available resources

Thoroughly research and explore all options – such as day programs and in-home care – that could help your parent prepare for a transition to assisted living or memory care, should the need arise. **Tip:** If you know anyone who has navigated a similar situation, ask for their advice or recommendations.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|
| Adult day services | _____ | _____ |
| Assisted living communities | _____ | _____ |
| Companions/visitors | _____ | _____ |
| Home care agencies | _____ | _____ |
| Senior centers | _____ | _____ |
| Short-term stay options | _____ | _____ |
| Transportation services | _____ | _____ |

Assemble a care team and plan

Ask for help from family, neighbors or care professionals. Everyone can play a meaningful part in caring for your parent. Even a simple phone call to keep loneliness at bay can make a big impact.

| Care task | Name | Preferred method of contact/info |
|-----------|-------|----------------------------------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

Care for yourself

It's vitally important that you make sure your needs are met so you can continue providing the best care for your parent. Below, make a list of routines and events that are important to you. For example, a date-night with your spouse or semi-monthly wellness appointments that you can't miss.

Things that are important to me

Use the space below to create your self-care plan. Make sure you're getting enough sleep, eating well and exercising. If things become overwhelming, consider talking to a therapist.

My self-care plan

Discover more resources, insight and support at
TheCaregiversGuide.com.



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