

Providing Care From a Distance

Caring for a parent or loved one can be a difficult task in the best of situations. Things get much more complex and stressful when that loved one lives far away from you. No matter the distance, you can find yourself plagued with stressful questions: Are they getting what they need? Can they make all their payments? What if something happens?

While you can't be prepared for every contingency, it is possible to set up a situation where you can feel better about the care your loved ones are receiving while so far away and be assured that things are in place in case something unforeseen does occur.

Before anything else, assess the needs of your loved ones. Determine the aspects of their lives that you need to oversee to ensure that they are taken care of. Whether it is medical, financial, or something you may not be aware of, you need to cover all the bases. Talk to your loved one and any other family members who may be able to provide additional information so you can be prepared for everything.

The medical needs of your aging loved one are best addressed by their health care providers. Speak to doctors, therapists and social workers familiar with your loved one to get a clear picture of their health concerns and needs. Relying only on your loved ones for information leaves too much to chance that they don't remember details correctly or forget something altogether. Don't be afraid to ask as many questions as you need to feel comfortable in providing care.

Finances are also a major source of stress for care givers. If your loved ones are unable to reliably pay their own bills, managing their accounts can be a difficult and time-consuming task. Handling your own accounts can be difficult enough, so it may be smart to look into a personal bill paying service to ensure that their bills are paid in a timely manner. This is especially helpful in case an emergency should arise.

Something else to consider is the day-to-day requirements of your loved one. Whether it is grocery shopping, traveling to appointments or simple tasks around the house, there are things that you can't do for them without physically being there to do them. Look into making arrangements with family or friends who live nearby to help out if possible. Church groups and senior organizations in the community may also be available to lend a hand when necessary. Regardless, be sure that the help is coming from individuals and organizations your loved one is comfortable with.

One of the most difficult things to arrange is the creation of an overall plan in case of an emergency. Things can happen at the most unexpected times, but enacting a plan to ensure the right numbers are called and the proper medical care is given can lead to peace of mind for everyone. One option would be to compile a book or binder that collects all pertinent information regarding medications, allergies, medical concerns, emergency contact numbers and your loved one's name and address to have available should a problem arise.

The most important aspect when making all of these plans is how your aging loved one feels. All the planning and arrangements come to nothing if they make the person being cared for uncomfortable or unhappy. Be sure to include them in the preparations from the start and taking their opinions and feelings

to heart. Having to depend on others for the care and support is difficult enough. Don't strip away all their independence by making decisions without their input.

Caring for a loved one is a difficult yet rewarding experience, even from a distance. Putting all the elements together to provide the necessary care can be time consuming, but it can help bring you closer together with your loved one. As you provide care from a distance, remember that covering the details makes things easier on both you and your loved one.