

Long Distance Caregiving

Long distance caregiving is very common today. Long distance caregiving can take many forms of care from a simple phone call to the aging loved one once a day, to arranging in home care assistance for the aging loved one. Many long distance caregiver's work as "coordinators" arranging everything from meals on wheels, to doctor's appointments, to insurance issues, to ordering in home medical equipment.

Caregiving, whether it is long distance or not, is often a long term task. Long distance caregiving might start out with a simple phone call, and quickly escalate to daily phone calls, setting up services from afar, and phone conferences with the aging parent's physician or social worker. It may also involve trying to move the loved one to another living facility which may require emails, phone calls, and multiple trips to the aging loved one's home.

Long distance caregiving is not a new form of caregiving. It is estimated that about 7 million adults are long-distance caregivers. Most of the caregivers are caring for an aging parent that lives an hour or more away and the majority of these caregivers are women, working full time, and caring for their own family. Men represent about 40% of caregivers. Anyone can be a long distance caregiver regardless of gender, income, age, social status, or employment.

Tips for Long Distance Caregiving:

- Look for help in the local community, such as a neighbor to the aging loved one. Explain what is going on, and give the neighbor numbers of family and caregivers to call if needed.
- Look for senior resources in the aging loved one's community. This may be done by calling the local Area Agency on Aging or visiting the website www.N4A.org to find a local AAA near the aging parent.

- Make a list of the aging parent's medication, as well as a list of their current medical conditions, and physicians contact information. Distribute to other family members.
- When visiting the aging parent's house, look for any possible hazards, signs of hoarding, and old food in the refrigerator. Also check for any bills or mail that may have been overlooked or not opened, and find out why.
- Find out if the aging parent has an advanced directive, will, or general health care preferences. The long distance caregiver should have a copy of that information.
- Call as often as possible. Check in just to say hello.
- Plan visits with the aging parent. Have a list of things to accomplish or help the aging parent with while visiting.
- Help your aging parent stay in touch as well. Program frequently called phone numbers into the parent's phone or enlist a neighbor to assist with phone calls.
- When visiting, spend time with the parent. Sometimes that is just sitting and watching TV, going for a drive, out to lunch or dinner, or just sitting quietly.

Care giving is not easy for, and long distance care giving can have its challenges. But knowing that an aging parent is safe, and happy, even from afar, can be rewarding for both child and parent.