

# Tips and Tools for Safe and Supportive Caregiving

Most people either are caregivers, know a caregiver, will become a caregiver, or will need care during their lives.<sup>1</sup> Caregiving, and in particular caregiving for a close family member, chosen family, partner, or friend, can be a very rewarding and meaningful role. It can also be a challenging one.



## What challenges do family caregivers face?

- As a loved one's medical needs increase and caregiving duties expand or continue over time, unexpected physical, emotional, and/or financial hardships may arise.
- Family carers may not identify themselves as caregivers. They may not recognize that their roles are being redefined as the demands of the situation change.
- It may be difficult for some caregivers to accept that they are now responsible for parents who raised and cared for them.
- Most people are surprised to take on the new roles and few know where to turn for financial, legal, medical, and emotional support.
- Shifting roles may become more complicated for families with histories of unresolved conflict. Caregivers harboring residual anger may respond to a loved one inappropriately and without fully understanding the changes that have occurred.
- Family caregivers may feel guilty about having any negative feelings. They may not have someone to talk with who understands their experience.

## What is the impact of caregiver challenges on the care recipient?

- The demands of caregiving may get in the way of providing proper, quality care. For example, a caregiver may desire a break and leave an adult who is unable to care for themselves alone.
- Caregivers who have not acknowledged their caregiving role or are new to the challenges of caring for a loved one may lack knowledge and skills to adequately meet their needs. This may lead to failing to assist a loved one who can't remember to take their medication.
- Unprocessed feelings of anger held from childhood or adolescence may result in caregiver ambivalence and poor care. A reluctant caregiver may threaten to move the family member into a long-term care facility, a fear for many older adults.
- Family conflict among siblings and other relatives about their caregiving roles and responsibilities may negatively impact care for their loved one.
- Without appropriate supports in place, unchecked caregiver challenges could potentially lead to elder mistreatment.
- On the other hand, these new roles can help with learning resilience, patience, and problem-solving. Caregivers and care recipients understand and can promote the value of care, and model roles for future generations.

<sup>1</sup> Paraphrasing a quote by Rosalynn Carter

## What services are available to support family caregivers and their loved ones?

- **Caregiver education and training** – Discover strategies to assist loved ones with dementia or other diseases and conditions.
- **Counseling** – Learn cognitive techniques for stress management.
- **Support groups for caregivers** – Exchange resources, share caregiving struggles without judgment, and learn from peers.
- **Family meetings** – Address and resolve family conflicts around caring for a loved one.
- **Adult Day Health Care** – Programs offer a range of services including therapy, engaging activities, and meals for older people.
- **Respite care** – Receive short-term relief from caregiving for a day or several weeks, at home, in a facility, or in an adult day center.



## How can practitioners and service providers better support family caregivers?

- Exercise cultural humility in all interactions with caregivers and care recipients.
- Become educated in the needs of communities through community advisors and informants.
- Ask about the preferences and values of the care recipient.
- Listen to the lived expertise of family caregivers.
- Enlist the support of multidisciplinary team members to provide comprehensive care and support.

## How can policies promote better caregiving?<sup>2</sup>

- Economic policies can promote health and wellness for older adults.
- Tax exemptions can help to reduce out of pocket expenses for care recipient necessities.
- Flexible workplace policies can be adopted to support family caregivers.
- Health providers can be reimbursed for the additional time spent in helping families understand their loved ones' care needs and explaining available supports.
- Policies can help support post-graduate education for providers to become better informed on caregiver responsibilities and care recipient needs to best support families.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, visit [California Coalition on Family Caregiving](#)

## What are some best practice tips and takeaways for family caregivers?

### Ask for help

Support is available to help manage caregiving duties and maintain mental wellness.

### Talk to someone

Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, support group peer, or faith leader.

### Advocate for loved ones

Honor that you are the expert for you and your family. Be curious, ask questions, gather information, and become educated.

### Helpful Resources

Check with **local community centers** or **faith centers** for community-based resource directories or health fairs, or access **community-based services** such as:

- [Caregiver Action Network](#)
- [California Caregiver Resource Centers](#)
- [Alzheimer's Association – Caregiving](#)
- [Adult Day Health Care](#)
- [AARP Resources for Caregivers and Families](#)
- [ARCH National Respite Locator Service](#)



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