

Getting the Help You Need



Caregiving can be the most rewarding experience and a major source of stress. As a caregiver, you can experience stress in many forms. The daily obligations of personal care, financial burdens of long term care, and even social isolation from friends and family can add up to significant stress that impacts your health.

The Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP) is here to help. The program provides services to both the caregiver and the loved one being cared for.

The staff are trained and knowledgeable in programs available in your area. Contact the Family Caregiver Support program today. We are here to listen and help you!

To find your Family Caregiver Support Program, call 1-800-422-3263 or visit our website at www.adsa.wa.gov and click on your county of residence.

Asking for and accepting help is not always easy. Here are some ideas to help.

► **Hold a family meeting**

A family meeting is an opportunity for everyone involved to get a better understanding of the current situation, to identify potential problems and solutions, and work through the sharing of caregiving tasks. Involve everyone else who is concerned and/or may be affected by the care decisions. Try to include long distance family members as well by hosting a meeting when they're in town, holding a conference call, or by getting their input beforehand.

Remember, it normally takes more than one conversation to figure everything out. Small steps can be more helpful than a huge leap that leaves everyone upset or confused. Don't wait for a "crisis" to get your family together. Have family meetings before difficult issues arise. If you need help holding a family meeting consider calling in a professional – a case manager, counselor, trained facilitator or mediator, or member of the clergy trained in family counseling.

Recognize that caregiving involves sensitive topics that may generate emotional responses for everyone. Family discussions bring with them a history – family roles, expectations and past resentments. Keep the meetings focused on the current issues rather than past conflicts. Listen to what the person being cared for has to say, and be sure to hear the feelings of all involved. Develop a written plan listing what each person will do and when he or she will do it.

► **Be prepared – think about how others could help**

The next time someone offers to help, be prepared, and say "yes". People can be the most helpful if you tell them precisely what is needed. Make a list of what you are already doing and what else needs to be done. This might include things like cooking meals, doing the laundry, helping with bathing, driving to medical appointments, taking care of the bills, housework, yard work, etc.

Go back through the list and identify things others may be able to do. You now have a specific “tasks to do list” available for those times when relatives or friends ask if they can help. For example, “I need to go to my doctor’s appointment this Tuesday, could you visit with mother for an hour or so then?” or “I worry about dad losing touch with his senior center friends, could you take him to the senior center with you sometime in the next couple of weeks?”

▶ **Build on your support network**

Think about the people you might ask for help. Include those who have offered and those who you think might be possibilities. Other family, neighbors, or friends in your own support network are a valuable resource. Often, people do really want to help – they just don’t know what to do.

When looking for help, there may be people you don’t even know about yet! If your mother belongs to a church, senior center, or service club, people in that organization could be looking for ways to help others. Bulletins or newsletters are a great place to “advertise” your need for help.

▶ **Increase your chances of getting a “yes”**

You may be more successful in getting help by considering what tasks potential helpers feel most comfortable doing. Some people prefer more practical tasks like cooking, shopping, laundry. Others like more personal tasks like providing company, reading mail or books, or driving someone to an appointment.

Also consider what could be a “natural fit” or easily worked into someone else’s typical routine. For example, a neighborhood teenager might want to mow the lawn or walk the dog. Your sister-in-law may be able to shop for your mom while she’s shopping for her own family. Or, a church acquaintance may be able to bring over a pot of homemade soup or stop by to visit once a week.

▶ **Use community resources**

A range of services is available in most communities to help older adults or those with disabilities and their families. Some programs designed to serve the adult can also help the caregiver, such as meals being brought in, medical alert programs (e.g. Lifeline), chore or homemaker services, adult day care, or home health care. Your Family Caregiver Support Program – which offers information and assistance, training, and respite care along with other services – can help you determine what might be most helpful.

The Family Caregiver Support Program can help you to get started.

Please call 1-800-422-3263 or visit our website at www.adsa.wa.gov and click on local services to find your local Family Caregiver Support program.