

Alzheimer's Caregiving: Share the Care, It's a Family Affair

Tips for Meeting with Family Members and Involving them in the Care for a Loved One

Many demands fall on the shoulders of a caregiver to a loved one with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia; for this reason, family members often need to band together in support. Involving family members and friends can relieve some of the burden of care while allowing the talents of an entire team to provide the best care. With more people contributing, the quality of care will be positively impacted and the likelihood of caregiver burnout will be lessened.

Each person in this care network needs to balance their love, concerns and desire to help with realistic expectations of time, personal strengths, weaknesses and anticipations. Many families have history and dynamics that can be both positive and negative. So, how do you involve siblings, spouses and children without resurfacing old conflicts? We have a few tips to help you engage others by their strengths so that you can share the care.

1. **It is not "one and done"** – Realize that you should hold a series of family meetings on a regular basis to discuss care and the well-being of your loved one, as it will likely be difficult to cover all the necessary issues in one meeting. Each meeting should have a defined objective and schedule. Going off topic or running long may discourage members from joining future meetings. At the conclusion of each meeting, provide a summary of the discussion so that everyone has a clear understanding of the issues covered as well as what they may have agreed to.
2. **Play to your strengths** – Everyone has talents. Use your company of relatives to gain support in areas where they can positively contribute; you may need to get creative. Often, family members will play roles based on their standing within the family, relationship to the loved one needing help, or simply based on special talents (e.g., a healthcare background). It's possible that the primary caregiver may be different from the one who handles the financial aspects, which also may be different from the person who takes the lead on researching information. It is also likely that one person will fulfill several roles, determining who is best to take the lead in these areas will set you up for a great start:
 - Daily Care
 - Respite – who can fill in while the primary caregiver takes a break (build this in to your plan)

- Health Care/ Medical Care – should align with resident’s health care directives
 - Financial Concerns
 - Legal Matters
 - Communication
3. **No criticisms, no kidding** – Disagree with something? Present an alternative plan and be prepared to assume the obligation instead of criticizing. There are no arm-chair quarterbacks in caregiving. If you disagree with how something is handled, unless you are prepared to oversee that role yourself, your suggestions may not be welcomed. Be respectful and not critical when bringing up a topic where you think you have a better solution. Be careful; if you disagree with how someone is handling their responsibility, you may need to be prepared to take that duty.
4. **You may need a referee** – Try as you might, family dynamics can usurp a well-planned meeting. Soliciting the support of a social worker or even hiring a geriatric care manager can circumvent distractions and keep everyone focused. If you find yourself in a difficult position, you may also want to consider a family counselor or family minister to help guide you all through this difficult time. Don't forget the support you can find with friends, colleagues and support groups.
5. **Don't forget the out-of-towners** – When a family member is unable to provide care locally, be sure to keep in touch with them by phone, mail or email and utilize their skills. Examples of how they may contribute include providing emotional support, communicating with family, researching services in the community, visiting when possible to give daily caregivers a break, or managing finances.
6. **Include the kids** – Visits with grandkids can boost the spirits of the loved one. Encourage and schedule these visits. Forming close ties with children not only provides joy to your loved one, it can also provide the children with their own sense of contribution to the family dynamic. There are many ways in which children can help to enrich daily life for your loved one, we've compiled a few tips:
- Draw pictures or make greeting cards
 - Sing or play music
 - Play card or board games
 - Offer comfort through hugs and physical contact
 - Join in a craft or family outing

7. **Realize that one person cannot do it all** – Avoid the martyr syndrome and accept help. Asking for help is one of the most difficult things to do, and, in turn, learning to freely receive help that is offered can be a struggle. Make a list of small tasks that if completed will make your job easier: grocery shopping, raking the leaves or mailing a package. When someone asks if they can help, say, “YES!” and ask them to pick one of these chores. They will feel good about helping and you will be able to check a task off your list.

Caring for a loved one is a journey with many turns. Be grateful for the good days and seek support for those trying times. Don't forget to put effort in to helping yourself, be open to accepting help from others and be familiar with your professional resources. It takes a community to care for someone with Alzheimer's. Ask for their help.

About ActivCare

ActivCare Living develops and manages residential memory care communities designed to enhance the lives of those with memory loss. With locations in Carlsbad, Chula Vista, Pacific Beach, 4S Ranch, Long Beach, Yorba Linda, and coming soon to Orange. ActivCare's specialized assisted living communities, activity programs, experienced staff and compassionate care are purpose-built to meet the special needs of those with Alzheimer's or related dementia. For more information about ActivCare Living and its communities, please contact (888) MEM-LOSS or visit activcareliving.com.