

Sharing Responsibilities

Informal Caregiving

When confronted with the complex needs of an elder needing care, families often decide to divide up the responsibilities so that the caregiving does not end up being one person's job. If one family member has some free time and enjoys driving, she could be the one responsible for providing some transportation for the relative. If another is a skilled home repairman, he would be a good choice to work on home maintenance for the relative.

Responsibilities can be divided according to a range of criteria. Here are a few of them:



ABILITY

One member of your family may be good at fixing meals. Another at fixing cars. And yet another may simply be a good companion. Take a critical look at the family members and friends who are willing to help. What are their occupations? What are their hobbies? What are their particular skills? Deciding who can do what is often the best place to start.

DESIRE

Even though a person has particular skills, he or she may not want to provide them. Someone who works as a nurse all day, for instance, may not want to be an informal nurse at night and on the weekends. After you figure out what people are good at, you'll want to ask everyone what they would like to do—and some of the answers may surprise you.

LOCATION

For some kinds of help, it is best to choose someone who lives close to the relative. For daily care needs or emergency/crisis management, the closer the caregiver lives the better. For needs that are weekly or monthly, such as weeding the garden or small home repairs, driving a short distance may be fine. For those who live far away, telephone calls and letters might be the best help they can give. Look at the locations of all possible caregivers, and rank them according to the jobs that need to be done.

Dividing responsibilities among family members is one way to approach the complex demands of caregiving.

TIME

No one has enough time to do everything; that is why you divide up the responsibilities. What you need to figure out is how much time each person has and when they have it. Some responsibilities need to be handled every evening, some at random times throughout the day and some during the weekend.

EQUIPMENT

Look at what equipment and supplies each person has—such as a car, a truck or a computer—this is another way of assigning tasks and responsibilities, particularly those that require some form of equipment.

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

Some of the relatives and friends will have other responsibilities—such as young children, a disabled spouse or a particularly demanding job—which will limit the time and effort they can commit to caregiving.