

# How To *Be a Caregiver*

Whether you're an informal caregiver caring for a relative, or a professional caregiver - all caregivers share certain experiences.

A caregiver is anyone who provides assistance to another person so that person can maintain an independent lifestyle.

For many people, caregiving isn't a job or a duty. It is doing what is right for a loved one. Caregiving is an unspoken promise that so many of us make in our relationships, to be there for our loved ones when they need us. Unfortunately, few people have the time, resources or ability to care for their aging or disabled loved one without any help. It is important as a caregiver to know your limits, take care of yourself, know your resources in the community, and understand the wants and needs of the person needing care.

## **Successful caregiving**

Being a successful caregiver means finding a balance between providing the necessary care and encouraging the care receiver to be as independent as possible. Discussing the following questions with the person under your care may help you find the balance.

- How does he/she see themselves in the role of the care receiver?
- What does he/she need from you?
- What can the care receiver do for him/herself?
- Does the care receiver know what to expect from you?
- Can you meet those expectations?
- What support is available in your family and community?

The caregiver is one of the most important people in the life of the care receiver. A caregiver doesn't have to be family or a loved one. There are numerous types of caregivers. Sometimes the best care plan

includes a combination of caregiving types and caregivers.

## **Insights from a caregiver**

For anyone thinking about becoming a caregiver, you should:

- Like people
- Be patient
- Be flexible in your approach to providing services to others
- Get experience in a variety of care settings before you decide on any particular one.

## **Insights from a care receiver**

For anyone currently receiving or needing personal caregiving, consider the following:

- Care receivers and caregivers must be reliable and dependable.
- Care receivers should look for skills and abilities including physical strength and endurance.
- Care receivers and caregivers must create a balanced partnership to be an effective team.
- Care receivers must know themselves; their abilities and limitations; their needs.
- Care receivers and caregivers must be flexible.
- Care receivers must understand the needs of caregivers.
- The relationship between caregiver and care receiver

Each care receiver's style of receiving care and each caregiver's style of giving care is as varied and individual as the persons themselves. Cooperation between caregiver and receiver is necessary to help the situation work out to both parties satisfaction.

However, this collaboration doesn't always come easy. The key to cooperation between the care receiver and the caregiver is open communication and mutual respect. Respect is necessary not

only for the other person, but for oneself as well. Without self-respect it is difficult to express concern for the other person or to ask questions that help clarify expectations. As a caregiver knowing what the expectations of the care receiver are is a must in providing quality care.

Open communication is crucial in establishing an effective working relationship between caregiver and care receiver. Being open, honest, and as straightforward as possible about what is expected from each other is imperative due to the personal nature of the relationship. Confusion and poor communication are destructive and can wreak havoc on an otherwise good working relationship.

While it is true that misunderstandings and mistakes often occur during communication and perceptions may differ, these differences should not be allowed to become barriers to effective communication.

Very often, the failure to discuss problems and misunderstandings leads to aggravation of the situation. It is beneficial to the relationship to discuss differences and to talk about how things are perceived by one another. However, in some situations the differences between caregiver and receiver are too large to overcome, and severing the working relationship may be the only solution.

When the initial relationship between caregiver and care receiver is established, ongoing maintenance is necessary as it is in all extended employment situations. This particular association is especially delicate due to several unique characteristics. These include the one-on-one interactions and physical dependency the employer has on the employee. Of course the level of dependency varies with each caregiving situation, but the ongoing need for constant communication is crucial for the working relationship to remain positive and healthy for both the caregiver and care receiver. Flexibility and a give

and take attitude from both parties are essential.

### **Self esteem and changing habits**

For many of us, learning to accept help from others may be easier said than done. Like most human beings, individuals with disabilities often enter the world of care receiving without the requisite knowledge and skills to ease the transition from independence to dependence. Examples include: lack of knowledge of the skills necessary to effectively manage the role and responsibilities associated with being an employer, knowing how to direct the care needed, and an awareness of the necessity to maintain personal characteristics such as self-esteem in the face of adversity.

Making a decision to take on all of the aspects of an employment relationship can take a great deal of time and effort and may feel a bit overwhelming. (Link to employers guide) Acquiring knowledge and building skills that are needed to hire someone and develop a healthy caregiver/care receiver relationship takes both time and practice. Responsibilities associated with being an employer may include hiring, training, maintaining a working relationship and replacing caregivers as necessary.

However, anything worthwhile typically demands hard work and gaining experience through trial and error. Building an effective employer/employee relationship between the caregiver and care receiver is no exception.

Division of responsibilities is part of the formal process that must occur in the employer/employee relationship. Attention to detail is critical in both the development and maintenance of the working relationship. One of the key issues centers around the area of control. For the care receiver, asserting some level of control over aspects of daily living is critical but not always easy. Maintaining independence while being dependent on another individual requires both patience

and practice. A feeling of independence hinges on the need to possess certain abilities and being able to utilize them.

Sometimes it is necessary for a person with a disability to look at areas other than the physical self to assert their independence. As for most of us, maintaining self esteem in a difficult situation can be challenging, and individuals with disabilities are no exception. Relying on others for assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) such as eating, bathing, mobility, grooming, reading and writing, is no easy task and can lead to frustration and depression if not properly tended. Developing a perspective that enhances self-reliance and independence when receiving the help of others usually requires time and patience and the acceptance that change is necessary in order to maintain a certain quality of life.

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