

# Tips for Encouraging Sibling Participation<sup>1</sup>

## Let siblings know their help is wanted and needed.

We often think that it is obvious that we need help and what that help might be. Remember that our family members are not mind readers, they may not respond to hints! Let them know what kind of help you need. Waiting for offers will just lead to resentment. Practice saying “yes” to offers of help, even when the offer isn’t exactly what you had in mind.

## Keep siblings in the loop.

Even though your siblings might not call as often as you would like, keep them informed of doctor appointments and changes in your loved one’s condition. This will make future conversations easier and reduce frustration when they don’t understand your concerns. Emailing to everyone at once or having one sibling call another sibling might reduce the pressure on you to “do it all.” Writing a letter or sending a round robin letter can also keep everyone informed. Keep a copy so you have something to refer back to. Having a family meeting or regular check in times can also help in having everyone on the same page.

## Listen to siblings’ opinions concerning care decisions and be willing to compromise.

Even though you are the primary caregiver, you and your siblings are in this together. Look for common ground, so as to not set up a win/lose situation. Even if it isn’t done your way, ask yourself how bad it, really, that it is done a different way is. Try to stay open to their input.

## Ask siblings to complete specific tasks.

Sometimes we put out vague requests for help. It may be hard for others to know what we really want. Making your request for help concrete will allow you to get a definite response, e.g. Can you come this Sunday and watch mom while I go to church?” rather than “I sure would like to go to church some Sunday.” Often a “to do” list gives others a chance to choose something, thus increasing the likelihood of them following through.

## Allow siblings to help in ways they are able. Have realistic expectations.

Not everyone is comfortable doing hands on care. Look at what they CAN do, not what they CAN’T do . Build on their strengths, skills and preferences. Also take into consideration their own health limitations, other family commitments, travel distance and time, and their emotions vis a vis caregiving and their relationship to the care receiver. Some are more willing to help in short bursts, others on a weekly schedule. Negotiate both their availability and your needs.

## Accept siblings for who they are.

This is probably one of the hardest things to do. But we cannot change them and changing family dynamics takes a long time and a firm commitment. You can only change you and how you respond to situations. It is hard to let go of old grudges and unresolved issues from the past, but the more you can keep the issues in the here and now, the more successful you will be in getting cooperation. But you can take care of yourself along the way!

## Reach out to the community

There are support groups, community agencies, religious organizations and volunteer support available. Use these to help you in your caregiving as well as asking for family support. Don’t forget friends, neighbors and extended family as possible helpers.

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<sup>1</sup> California Caregiver Resource Centers ©2005 Family Caregiver Alliance