

ELDERCARE

Deciding to Be a Caregiver

If you're considering the idea of becoming a caregiver to an elderly loved one, it could be one of the most difficult decisions you'll have to make in your lifetime. Eldercare assumes a range of possibilities, from minor to full-time care, depending on the situation. But, in any case, asking yourself the following questions might help in your decision.

Do You Have Time?

Studies have shown that most eldercare is provided by women. If you're married, do you and your spouse have the time and resources to provide what is or might become near-total care? Have you talked openly about the situation with each other? Could one of you afford to leave your job if it became necessary? If you have children living at home, how do they feel about sharing their parents' time with that relative?

What Are Your Expectations?

Are they realistic? If possible, everyone involved, including the elderly relative, should discuss those expectations. Be realistic about what you can or can't be expected to do. While it might seem unpleasant at the time, this is when you might also bring up the possibility of future nursing home care and desired funeral arrangements.

Is Your Communication Good?

How well do you and other members of your family communicate with the elderly relative? If communication is lacking now, don't assume it will improve. If your relative suffers from Alzheimer's disease, understand that, eventually, there will be little rational communication at all. And some elderly people, due to frustration or depression, can become quite abusive. Are you and your family prepared to handle the situation?

Are Living Arrangements Appropriate?

If the situation calls for it, do you have room in your home to provide care? Are you and your family prepared to handle the situation? Can your home be outfitted to compensate for mobility impairments which require a cane or wheelchair? Will your elderly relative be disturbed by the presence of young children, music, TV and telephones?

Is Medical and Legal Care Good?

Do you and your spouse have a good relationship with your relative's primary doctor? Does the doctor listen to your questions and concerns? Remember that in an emergency, you or your spouse will probably be the one who'll deal with the doctors. Do you have a power of attorney for your relative or a guardianship order from the court? Does your relative have a current will? It might be a good idea to speak to your relative's doctor and lawyer with the relative present.

The Loving Decision

Being open about the situation and considering all sides of the issue before you make such a loving decision can result in appropriate eldercare which satisfies everyone.

