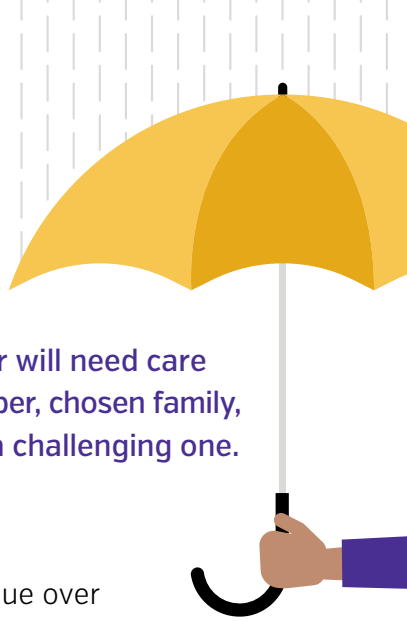
Tips and Tools for Safe and Supportive Caregiving



Most people either are caregivers, know a caregiver, will become a caregiver, or will need care during their lives.[1] Caregiving, and in particular caregiving for a close family member, chosen family, partner, or friend, can be a very rewarding and meaningful role. It can also be a challenging one.

What challenges do family caregivers face?

- As a loved one's medical needs increase and caregiving duties expand or continue over time, unexpected physical, emotional, and/or financial hardships may arise.
- Family carers may not identify themselves as caregivers. They may not recognize that their roles are being redefined as the demands of the situation change.
- It may be difficult for some caregivers to accept that they are now responsible for parents who raised and cared for them.
- Most people are surprised to take on the new roles and few know where to turn for financial, legal, medical, and emotional support.
- Shifting roles may become more complicated for families with histories of unresolved conflict. Caregivers harboring residual anger may respond to a loved one inappropriately and without fully understanding the changes that have occurred.
- Family caregivers may feel guilty about having any negative feelings. They may not have someone to talk with who understands their experience.

What is the impact of caregiver challenges on the care recipient?

- The demands of caregiving may get in the way of providing proper, quality care. For example, a caregiver may desire a break and leave an adult who is unable to care for themselves alone.
- Caregivers who have not acknowledged their caregiving role or are new to the challenges of caring for a loved one may lack knowledge and skills to adequately meet their needs. This may lead to failing to assist a loved one who can't remember to take their medication.
- Unprocessed feelings of anger held from childhood or adolescence may result in caregiver ambivalence and poor care. A reluctant caregiver may threaten to move the family member into a long-term care facility, a fear for many older adults.
- Family conflict among siblings and other relatives about their caregiving roles and responsibilities may negatively impact care for their loved one.
- Without appropriate supports in place, unchecked caregiver challenges could potentially lead to elder mistreatment.
- On the other hand, these new roles can help with learning resilience, patience, and problem-solving. Caregivers and care recipients understand and can promote the value of care, and model roles for future generations.

1 Paraphrasing a quote by Rosalynn Carter

What services are available to support family caregivers and their loved ones?

Caregiver education and training

Discover strategies to assist loved ones with dementia or other diseases and conditions.

Counseling

Learn cognitive techniques for stress management.

Support groups for caregivers

Exchange resources, share caregiving struggles without judgment, and learn from peers.

Family meetings

Address and resolve family conflicts around caring for a loved one.

Adult Day Health Care

Programs offer a range of services including therapy, engaging activities, and meals for older people.

Respite care

Receive short-term relief from caregiving for a day or several weeks, at home, in a facility, or in an adult day center.

How can practitioners and service providers better support family caregivers?

- Exercise cultural humility in all interactions with caregivers and care recipients.
- Provide accessible, multilingual, and culturally competent resources.
- Become educated in the needs of different populations through community advisors and informants.
- Ask about the preferences and values of the care recipient.
- Listen to the lived expertise of family caregivers.
- Enlist the support of multidisciplinary team members to provide comprehensive care and support.

How can policies promote better caregiving?[2]

- Economic policies can better address the needs of older adults to advance elder care and wellness.
- Tax exemptions can help to reduce out of pocket expenses for care recipient necessities.
- Flexible workplace policies can be adopted to support family caregivers.
- Health providers can be reimbursed for the additional time spent in helping families understand their loved ones' care needs and explaining available supports.
- Policies can help support post-graduate education for providers to become better informed on caregiver responsibilities and care recipient needs to best support families.

2 For more information, visit California Coalition on Family Caregiving

What are some best practice tips and takeaways for family caregivers?

Ask for help

Support is available to help manage caregiving duties and maintain mental wellness.

Talk to someone

Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, support group peer, or faith leader.

Advocate for loved ones

Honor that you are the expert for you and your family. Be curious, ask questions, gather information, and become educated.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Check with **local community centers** or **faith centers** for community-based resource directories or health fairs, or access **community-based services** such as:

- Caregiver Action Network
- California Caregiver Resource Centers
- Alzheimer's Association – Caregiving
- Adult Day Health Care
- AARP Resources for Caregivers and Families
- ARCH National Respite Locator Service

NCEA
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LOS ANGELES CAREGIVER RESOURCE CENTER
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