



HELPFUL HINTS

If Care is Needed at Home

Overview

Over 44 million Americans spend time caring for family members or friends who can no longer live on their own without assistance.¹ Family caregivers often find themselves juggling caregiving with work and other family responsibilities. Paid care may be needed to supplement the care they are providing and help their loved one to continue to live at home.

HELPFUL HINTS: If Care is Needed at Home, prepared in collaboration with the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC), will provide families with issues to think about and steps to take if a family member needs home care services.

Key Considerations

1. Assess your family member's needs

The first step in any caregiving situation is determining what kind of care may be needed. Does your family member need help with bathing, dressing, and other hands-on-care and/or activities such as shopping and cleaning? Does he or she have cognitive problems that pose a safety risk? Will your family member accept help? These and other questions will need to be addressed. Always remember, it is important to involve your family member in care planning discussions and decisions at each step along the way if he or she is able to participate.

2. Seek the advice of a professional if needed

Don't be afraid to enlist the assistance of a professional. You can access the Eldercare Locator, a free public service from the U.S. Administration on

Aging, at www.eldercare.gov or by phone M-F, 9:00 AM to 8:00 PM EST at 1-800-677-1116 to assist in finding resources in your local area. You may also visit the website for the National Association of Professionals Geriatric Care Managers at www.caremanager.org to find a care manager in your area. This is a professional who specializes in long-term care and can assist in evaluating needs and locating services.

3. Selecting a care provider

Help at home may come from a variety of sources depending on your family member's needs. A home care agency that includes services ranging from companion care to personal care may work best when your family member needs help with daily activities such as bathing and dressing and assistance with household chores. Your loved one may not require hands-on assistance and you might select an agency whose staff can assist with shopping, laundry, and similar tasks. You may also choose to hire an independent care provider. In making your selection, cost, staff availability, and needed staff skills will all factor into your decision.

4. Make sure to check references

Whichever option you choose, it is important that you check credentials. If the service comes through an agency, find out if the agency is licensed, what kind of background check they do when hiring staff, and what type of staff training and supervision they provide. If you are hiring an independent provider it is very important to do a background check, obtain references, and perform an on-site interview. Remember if you are hiring an independent person you will have full responsibility for supervising the care.

¹Caregiving in the U.S., National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, Funded by the MetLife Foundation, April 2004.

5. *Make sure the care provider is aware of any special care needs*

Whether or not the agency provides supervision, you should make certain that supervisors and direct care providers are aware of any likes and dislikes your family member may have, any special precautions such as allergies, or safety concerns that require attention as well as his or her medications and their potential side effects. Write down the important information and revise it as changes occur so that all caregivers, even substitutes, can refer to it. Never assume that information has been transferred from one person to another.

6. *Monitor the care*

Ongoing monitoring of the care is essential. It is important to keep in touch with care providers, both those who are providing the day-to-day direct care and the supervisors who are monitoring the care. Try to visit at various times of the day, unannounced on occasion, especially when the care provider is new. Speak with your family member about how things are going. Observe for any changes in his or her mood or behavior that may indicate that a problem exists. If you live at a distance or are unable to monitor the care yourself, you may want to hire a geriatric care manager to assume those responsibilities. Close monitoring is especially important if you have an independent provider.

7. *Intervene if problems arise*

If you are concerned about the care your loved one is receiving or you have questions, do not hesitate to contact the supervisor if the care is through an agency. Whatever the situation, it is important to address it early on. Remember that quality care for your family member is the first priority. The same is true of independent care providers, where it is especially important that you address any issues that arise.

8. *Have key contact and emergency information in an accessible location*

It is important that written information is available in your family member's home in the event of an emergency, including your family member's preferred hospital and contact information for you, a second family member, and his or her physician(s). Have available a current list of your family member's medical problems, allergies, and medications, as well as copies of insurance cards, living will or health care power-of-attorney documents should he or she need to go to the hospital. Write out directions to the home to easily direct emergency service providers. All of this is key to assuring your family member receives the best possible treatment.

To Learn More

Available at www.maturemarketinstitute.com are the guides *Understanding Home Care Agency Options* and *Hiring an Independent Caregiver* in the *Since You Care*® series. To obtain a copy of each guide, which includes tools for caregivers and a listing of resources, search under "All Publications" and select "Since You Care guides" from the drop down menu.

To receive a hard copy of the guides please email a request to the MetLife Mature Market Institute at maturemarketinstitute@metlife.com or write to MetLife Mature Market Institute, 57 Greens Farms Road, Westport, CT 06880.



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National Alliance for Caregiving

Established in 1996, the National Alliance for Caregiving, www.caregiving.org, is a nonprofit coalition of national organizations that focuses on issues of family caregiving across the life span. The Alliance was created to conduct research, do policy analysis, develop national programs, and increase public awareness of family caregiving issues.

