

YOUR EVOLVING ROLE AS A CAREGIVER

Life as a caregiver has its share of ups and downs: there are the rewards of knowing you're making a difference in someone's life, and the very real and troubling pain of watching a loved one's health decline.

As these signs develop, it's likely your own role will change. You may need to take on more care giving responsibilities, or consider enlisting outside help to provide an appropriate level of support to your parents as they age. At some point, you may have to help your loved one decide whether he or she can continue to manage in his or her own home, or whether a different type of living arrangement is required.

Talking to Your Parent

In many cases, your loved one will recognize that a different level of support than is required and need help making decisions about home care or other services in his or her own home. For others, a move to a different type of living accommodation may be a reality. This move can create an understandable amount of anxiety around the decision and the logistical concerns of doing so.

Still for others – and one of the more difficult challenges as a caregiver—your loved one may not accept or acknowledge that a different type of living arrangement is necessary for health and well-being. In starting a conversation about the need for living arrangement changes you may find you 'hit a brick wall.' Your loved one may not want to talk at all about changing capabilities, health or the possibility of having to move and may feel overwhelmed by the idea of so many life changes at once.

The following tips may be helpful:

- Keep in mind that your loved one wants and needs to maintain a sense of independence and dignity.
- Respect your loved one's right to self-determination and decision-making.
- Try to understand the fears and anxieties behind resistance. Listen, listen and listen some more.
- Recognize when your own fears, biases and values cloud your ability to offer support.
- Take care of yourself, so you can care for others.

- Enlist help. A trusted family physician or social worker can help you and your loved one develop a care plan. In cases where you believe your loved one is at risk, won't make

changes to reduce this risk, your loved one's physician can conduct an assessment and provide an objective opinion. Your EAP also offers free professional consultation and support and from your EAP's Resource Consultant.

- Look for solutions that are the least intrusive given the level of care required.
- Approach the subject gradually. Understand that progress toward a workable solution may be slow.
- Each conversation should take a small step towards the desired outcome.
- Make sure that each conversation focuses on your loved one's health and well-being, and your love and concern for them, as the primary drivers of the need for change.
- Conflicts with other members of the care team – e.g., siblings, other relatives – should be resolved separately.
- Timing is everything: the best time to have a conversation about future living arrangements is well before a crisis occurs. Make sure your loved one understands that just because you're talking about it, doesn't mean it's going to happen immediately. Believe this yourself.
- While discussing future plans for your loved one's health and well-being is best done when he or she is feeling well and are able to cope, this also provides a built-in excuse to put off the conversation. It's helpful to use 'what if ...' scenarios to stimulate discussion and motivate yourself and your loved one to begin the process of planning for potential future needs. For example:

“What if Mom's (or Dad's) health declined so they could no longer care for you?”

“What if you had a fall and were kept off your feet for a week/a month?”

“What if you had to spend time in a hospital for a week or longer?”

Understanding and adapting to your evolving role as a caregiver can be a challenge. But by remaining, open, honest and flexible you'll ensure that you carry out one of the most important jobs of your life with care, compassion and success.

For more information on this topic, contact your EAP at:

www.shepellfgi.com

We will answer your questions and direct you to the resources and help you need. This confidential service is available at no charge to employees and their family members as part of your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – a benefit provided by your employer to help you integrate home and work responsibilities and deal with issues before they become problems.