VNS Health

How to Support Your Caregiver Sibling

Family Caregiving

When a parent needs care, most of the day-to-day tasks fall on the child who lives closest. After all, it's a lot easier for a brother who lives 5 miles away to check in on a parent than it is for a sister who lives across the country, or even in another county. But if you provide less hands-on care than your sibling, you can still help. In fact, it's important to give them as much support as you can.

Here are some ways you can support your sibling while they are caring for your parents.

Check in often. Your sibling may have things under control, but caregiving can be very tiring. The responsibilities can change rapidly and dramatically. When you check in, ask how they're holding up or whether they need anything. Make specific offers to help — listen to what they talk about and ask whether you can meet any of the needs they mention. In addition, pay attention to *how* they talk. Do they sound frustrated, exhausted, or overwhelmed? Are they worried about losing their job because they've taken so much time off?

When everyday tasks like cooking, dressing, and bathing become difficult, a home health aide can offer help, as well as companionship, so your loved one can stay safe at home.

Learn More About Home Health Aides

Respect each others' viewpoints. Because your sibling sees your parents often, they might see a sign of decline that you don't notice in a 10-minute phone call. But they may not notice small or gradual changes that seem obvious to you when you visit.

Respect your sibling's version of events. If you visit only occasionally, you may see your parents on their best behavior. You've made a special trip, just to see them! They may complain less around you, for example, or insist that they are up for activities that usually tire them out.

Combine stories. Rather than bicker about who's right and who's wrong, combine what you and your siblings see and hear to get a more complete picture of your parents' health. Remember that parents may not tell all their children everything. Your mom may forget who she's told what, or she might not feel comfortable talking about some things with her sons.

Be tactful when you offer advice. If your sibling says one of your suggestions won't work, resist the urge to argue. Instead, listen to their reasons, and if you still think your idea is a good one, explore ways to address their concerns before bringing it up again.

Ask about hidden expenses. When you add up the money spent on your parents' care, take into account costs your sibling might not mention — such as gas, parking, or train fare; meal costs during hospital stays; or reduced income from working shorter hours.

Give your sibling a break. Time a visit to your parents so that it coincides with your sibling's vacation. Spend a day or two learning your parents' routine or any special care needs. Look into respite care too. VNS Health offers respite care in New York City and certain suburbs.

Be the bad guy. Your sibling deals with your parents on a daily basis, so do what you can to make sure they have a good relationship. For example, when it's time for your dad to stop driving, offer to fight that battle. Your dad might get mad at you, but by taking the brunt of his anger, you can protect your sibling. They still need to make sure your dad takes his medicines and follows his diet.

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