

WAYS TO HANDLE FAMILY CONFLICTS WHILE CAREGIVING

by Sheri Samotin – AgingCare.com

When it comes time to arrange care for your spouse or your aging parent, it works out best for everyone if family members can set aside their differences.

With heightened emotions at play in caregiving situations, both sides will be super-sensitive, tension will be exacerbated, and flare-ups will likely occur. While this is understandable, it is not very useful. Add sibling dynamics to this simmering pot and you have a recipe for a boil over.

1. **Find points of agreement.**

The one point that siblings can generally agree on is their goal to make sure that Mom or Dad receives the best care possible. Interestingly, this sentiment is generally only expressed by the adult children. Too often, the older adult wants to do whatever is easiest or creates the least amount of trouble for their children. An open and honest talk among all participants—caregivers and care recipients alike—is the best way to identify points of agreement. It can also be helpful to come back to these points from time to time, when the going gets rough; almost like pushing a "reset" button and reminding everyone of the real goal.

2. **Identify underlying tensions.**

The individual who takes on the bulk of the caregiving responsibility often has to handle criticism from family members who are less involved in the day to day care. At first, everyone may be on "good behavior," trying hard to come across as agreeable. However, when I talk with family members individually, I often learn about underlying tensions that already are (or may soon be) in the way of optimal caregiving and decision making. Interestingly, when I talk with the care recipient privately, it is not at all unusual for him to raise the topic of this tension and to point to it as one of the most stressful aspects of the situation.

3. **Start with what is, not what "should" or "might" be.**

Where do things stand right now? What options are available (or could be made available) to address or solve a particular problem? Often, I see families struggle and become overwhelmed when they jump to endpoints that might never occur, or wish for outcomes that are unrealistic. Doing the former makes things appear unnecessarily bleak, while doing the latter is really a form of denial. Taking a realistic and balanced look at what's going on can help put and keep matters in perspective.

4. **Take a dispassionate inventory.**

Care recipients need to speak their mind and give opinions regarding the type of care they believe they need and would like to see arranged. Caregivers need to work together to decide who can provide what. Is one sister great at organizing a schedule of caregivers and people to drive mom to her appointments? Maybe your brother is a physician and will be the best resource to go to for future medical issues. Perhaps there is a sibling who lives far away and doesn't have much time, but who will volunteer to be the communications director and set up a system for keeping everyone in the family in the information loop. Take stock of other kinds of resources, too (namely time and money). If each family member can find some way to contribute to the effort that is within his or her skills, time constraints, and financial ability, then things will flow more smoothly.

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5. Talk things over.

It may be a good idea to start holding family meetings for aging parents so that the entire group can get together to talk and reason things out. This may take several discussions, as people can have trouble arriving at final decisions regarding such emotional issues. Family members time to think things over and speak again. This is one of the benefits of discussing such situations before the conversations have to be held in "emergency mode" during a crisis.

6. Fights about trivial matters mean you're probably avoiding the core issue.

It's practically a given that you will encounter sibling conflicts while caregiving for elderly parents. Money isn't called the root of all evil for nothing. It is often at the core of tension among families—even though no one likes to admit it. If you find yourselves arguing about whether mom's home health care work should come on Tuesdays rather than Thursdays, or whether a wheelchair ramp should be the fold-away variety or permanently installed, you might be skirting the truly important issues. Take a break and return to compiling an inventory of the resources your family has to work with. Details can be hashed out later.

Sometimes family caregivers simply get stuck in their roles or attitudes and don't know how to change things.

In these cases, it is often important to get someone involved who can serve as the objective third party. This person doesn't have a stake in the game and isn't aware of the baggage that comes with every family. Sometimes, simply having an outsider scratch her head and ask why something is the way it is can be enough to get things unstuck.

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Thursday, January 19th, 2017

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Caregiving with Confidence

Caregiver Support Group – now welcoming new members

What is a Caregiver Support Group?

Family caregivers are generous and compassionate individuals who give a great deal of themselves to help their loved ones. The role of caregiving often takes a high toll on the emotional, physical and financial well-being of the caregiver. Our goal is to reassure families that they are not alone and that resources are available to assist them. The Support Group is designed to give you, the caregiver, an opportunity to openly discuss feelings, experiences and fears in a non-judgmental and supportive atmosphere. The group can provide emotional support and also assist with day-to-day practical issues. This is done by meeting with others who are in similar situations and who understand the challenges and are willing to share information, concerns and resources.

The Support Group meets in the Guild Room at St. George's Anglican Church, **168 Wilton Street** on Saturday mornings from 10:00 am. – 12:00 noon, every other week.

For more information or to join the group, call Caregiving with Confidence at 204-452-9491, or by e-mail info@caregivingwithconfidence.org.



We have a new name!



Rupert's Land Caregiver Services is now called Caregiving with Confidence. We are excited about this new name as it better reflects the work that we do to help family caregivers of older adults. Check out our new website - www.caregivingwithconfidence.org.

You can help us save on postage and printing costs by receiving your Caregivers' Page by e-mail.

If you would prefer to get your Caregivers' Page by e-mail send an e-mail to info@caregivingwithconfidence.org and we will take you off our regular mailing list and put you on our e-mail list.

If you wish to continue receiving your newsletter by regular mail, you don't need to do a thing! If you wish to be removed from our mailing list altogether, you can also contact us by e-mail or by calling 204-452-9491.



Canadian Virtual Hospice has recently launched some new, free online tools to support patients and their families:

MyGrief.ca
LivingMyCulture.ca

These tools were developed by national teams, with over 90 partners across Canada. They also had family advisors on the development teams to make sure the tools are "family approved." These tools are definitely worth checking out.

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*Pick-up date is **Thursday, December 8th, 2016***

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Supporting caregivers of older adults

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