



The Sojourner Project

...help for the journey

Six Essential Steps to Stress Free Caregiving

Family caregivers must always remember that *no one wants to be taken care of* and especially not in a way where they lose their sense of independence and self-determination. Losing control over one's life because of age or disability is both sad and frustrating and everyone involved struggles with the loss. Caregivers need to learn how to gently navigate the wants and needs of their loved one with the practical issues of their safety and well-being. Here are some of the basic steps to becoming a family caregiver:

Step One - Know Your Role

- **Overseer** is off to the side, not involved in any day-to-day decisions but ready to step in as needed.
- **Middleman** has a much more active role in their loved one's life. They are "doing" more for their loved one on a regular basis (housework, managing their money, taking them to appointments).
- **Caretaker** are those full-time caregivers responsible for all aspects of their loved one's care.

Step Two - Evaluate the Situation

Clearly understanding the current abilities and disabilities of your loved one will make it easier to not only care for their current needs but to better anticipate and prepare for any future needs. Evaluating or assessing their physical, mental and emotional abilities helps you know when and how to help.

Step Three - Make a Plan

This is a necessary process that most caregivers miss. It begins by putting a team in place with everyone understanding their roles and responsibilities regarding the care of your loved one. It involves identifying an effective Plan A - which is the one that is in place and working; knowing what Plan B is - for when (not if) things change; and to have a Plan C ready to implement in the event of a crisis.

Step Four - Gather Information

So much of the caregiver's burden and responsibility is in managing all of the medical, legal and financial affairs of their loved one. As you gather all of the necessary documents you can identify gaps in your loved one's long term care planning and avoid issues or problems down the road.

Step Five - Getting Organized

Using a simple organizational system can help alleviate the stress of juggling the added responsibilities of being a family caregiver and make it easier for others to step in and help more easily.

Step Six - Caring for the Caregiver

Managing your stress and actively practicing self-care is essential to maintaining your health and preventing caregiver burnout. Caregivers who don't take the time and effort to care for themselves experience higher rates of anxiety and depression.

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