

## Having the conversation: When you need to bring in hired care

Kathryn Betts Adams, MSW, PhD

Caring for your parent, spouse, or another family member sometimes starts all of a sudden. There is an accident, or your parent has a stroke. You become an instant caregiver.

Or caregiving can sneak up on you. You notice things starting to change, little by little. You fight it; your loved one fights it. You try to act like everything's about the same, but it cannot be denied: you notice your parent is forgetting their medications, they need help getting meals, they're not as clean and well-groomed as they used to be, their walk is unsteady and you worry about the stairs. You gradually become a caregiver.

Once the process starts, you will start adding tasks to help your loved one - first with occasional tasks, and then with increasing regularity. You spend more and more time, enlisting other family members, neighbors and friends. But you wonder how long you can keep this up the way things are. You are tired and stretched thin. You have other obligations. Maybe you have an emergency you have to attend to. At some point, you may need outside help to be there and provide your loved one the necessary care that you can't.

And then you must discuss it with your parent, grandparent, sibling, who needs care. This might be an easy conversation or a difficult one. It's understandable to be nervous about how to introduce this topic and what to say.

Don't put this conversation off too long—don't overthink till you are tied in knots—but it's helpful to be prepared for the concerns that may arise. Choose a good time of day when your person is least likely to be hungry, tired or grouchy, turn off TV or other distracting sounds, and approach it with a calm demeanor. You will need to be resolute in your decision.

Yes, your family member has the right to self-determination (unless they are very cognitively impaired), but you are the caregiver they are relying upon. Thus, it is your right, and your proper role, to make the decision that more help is needed and you need to hire caregivers.

The objections your loved one might have against having hired caregivers are many. Here are a few of the most common you might hear and ideas for handling them:

### 1 I don't want strangers in my house.

This is an age-old argument from many people when it comes to getting in-home help of any kind. There is no way around it, except to assure the care recipient that you will only bring in carefully selected and well-trained people.



The first time or two with someone coming in, you or another family member can also be present to provide reassurance to your care recipient. Soon it will seem routine for helpers to come in and your family member will see that they are trustworthy, competent and friendly.

### 2 We can't afford that.

There are many ways to pay for in-home care, depending on the medical needs of the person, their income, assets, insurance, and Veterans' status. If you know that your care recipient has sufficient savings, you can be confidently say, "Yes, we can afford it. It'll be fine." Or if you and other family members will be chipping in to help pay, you know that you are willing to do this and a decision has already been reached. You don't need to rehash it with the care recipient. Just be reassuring that you've considered the costs and it will be okay.



### 3 I'm fine. I don't need extra help.

This is a tough one because many times, our older family members are almost fine. They are almost able to do what they need to do to get through the day on their own. But you started on this caregiving journey because things weren't as fine as you thought they should be; you worry about the safety and wellbeing of your care recipient.



We suggest you not get pulled into this argument. So, rather than saying, "Oh yes you do need help!" and offering a long list of the reasons, we suggest you deflect that comment and just say, "Let's give it a try. I'm getting someone for next Monday. Then we'll see how you like the new helper and we can talk after they have been here a few times." Your upbeat, confident attitude may well rub off, or at least, cause your older family member to pause and adopt a wait-and-see attitude.

### 4 Why can't you come more often/put in more time, etc.? It's been going fine.

It's not too surprising that your elder family member, dealing with some combination of health problems, memory loss, and declining capacities, may not have noticed how much you and others have been doing to help. So this is wishful thinking. But you know how much you've been doing and how stretched you are.



Family caregivers often feel guilty about setting limits, including the decision to hire caregivers. However, giving more and more care without help can lead to physical and mental exhaustion for the caregiver. And, like everyone, caregivers like you have other responsibilities, interests, and aspirations to attend to. Keep your response simple: "I can't be here/do as much as I was (or as you need)." And if you must say, "I'm sorry," say it, but don't let your feelings of love, sympathy, and obligation stand in the way of making what you know is the right decision.

**Much like many other things in life - caring for a loved one is a marathon, not a sprint. It is best to start slow - a few hours here and there when you really need the help. Once your loved one starts getting used to someone other than you being around, the door will be open to get more support when you need it.**

