

Things to consider when taking on a caring role

Taking on caring - is there really a choice?

Some people say that taking on a caring role feels more like a duty or obligation than an active choice. Values, beliefs and perceptions about the 'right thing to do' can make decision making difficult.

Spouses in particular say that honouring their wedding vows meant they didn't really have a choice. The expectations held by family, friends and your family member may also weigh heavily - as well as the expectations you hold of yourself.

*"For me, it was a conscious decision...
but there was no real choice. I grew into it."*

There are many different types of caring situations - some involve weekly visits while others consist of 24-hour care. Try to get a clear picture of the type of care and support your family member will need, as this can help in making decisions about the level of care you and other family members can offer.

Choose the level of support you can offer

Having the right information will help you to understand what caring for your family member might involve. You might need more information on:

- ▣ the condition or illness and its likely consequences;
- ▣ the care that is likely to be required;
- ▣ assistance that may be available within your family;
- ▣ [aids and equipment](#) that could assist;
- ▣ services that are available; and
- ▣ the costs involved.

Some of this information will be available from your family member's GP, hospital doctor, social worker or health care professional. The [local Aged Care Assessment Service](#) (ACAS) can also assist - phone 1800 500 853 for contact details.

*"It took time to gather all the information I needed,
but finally I was clear about Dad's situation."*

You and other family members will need to choose which tasks you would be comfortable assisting with. For example, some carers are prepared to assist their family member with cooking or shopping but not with bathing or dressing. The help of family, friends and support services can be sought to fill some of the gaps.

Be cautious about the level of support you can offer

There may be reasons why you cannot offer your family member the level of care that you would like to. This might include:

Your health

It's not uncommon for carers to put the wellbeing of their family member before themselves. You will need to consider your own health and the limitations this might have on caring for your family member.



Your existing commitments

Caring will be an addition to your life which may already be quite busy. You might need to consider the demands of your work, study, family, pets and travel plans. How readily can these be put on hold?

"I have kids at school, so I knew that caring for Mum could only happen between 9am and 3pm."

The quality of your relationship

Caring for someone with whom you have not had a good relationship in the past can be difficult. One carer cautions, "If the relationship has been bad, caring is much harder - all the bad things come back."

The family support available

While caring can be incredibly rewarding, it can also be incredibly draining - particularly for those who are caring on their own. Try to share the care with other family members by dividing up the tasks.

Hold a family meeting to talk about your family member's needs and the options for help that are available. Use this as a way of involving family early on. Be assertive - ask for their help and support.

Advice from others who took on a caring role

- ☑ It's easier to see the benefits of helping than it is to see the impact this will have on your own life. Look after yourself too.
- ☑ Find someone to confide in - someone who will listen.
- ☑ Be persistent about getting the information you need - this might involve a number of visits to the GP.
- ☑ Don't let family think you have it all under control and that they will be interfering if they offer to help.
- ☑ Ask family members for help - you have the right to ask.
- ☑ Accept that you may need support services to help you care. This is not failure - it will help you to continue caring.

Further information:

- ☑ [Aged Care Assessment](#) - information sheet.
- ☑ [How and why to organise support services](#) - information sheet.
- ☑ [How and why to hold a family meeting](#) - information sheet.

Contact the [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) on 1800 242 636* to request the above information sheets be sent to you - or to find out about other information sheets in this series.

*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at website@carersvic.org.au