

How and why to get family to help with caring

Why share the care of your family member?

While there are many joys in caring for a family member or friend, there can also be many frustrations and challenges.

Sharing the care with other family members or friends can buffer the stress and reduce the physical and emotional toll for the main carer. It can also help family and friends to:

- ▣ Understand the situation better.
- ▣ Offer you a listening ear and support when needed.
- ▣ Know how to help without interfering.
- ▣ Offer information or suggestions.
- ▣ Contribute to decision making.
- ▣ Understand what needs to happen in an emergency (when the carer cannot provide the care).

"The more my sister helped out, the more she understood about Mum. Now she listens to me on the bad days."

Having others involved in caring can have real benefits for the person you're caring for too. It can provide them with:

- ▣ Opportunities for spending time with others.
- ▣ Different people to talk to.
- ▣ More people to rely on - a sense of being well supported.
- ▣ Other sources of information, advice and suggestions.
- ▣ Relief, that the main carer is being supported.

The person you care for may be quite concerned about your health and wellbeing and feel somewhat responsible for this. Sharing the care can be a relief and benefit to all involved.

Why you may be reluctant to ask family for help

There are many reasons why carers are often reluctant to ask family or friends to help. This may be because you:

- ▣ Believe that earlier requests were not heard.
- ▣ Don't want to impose on family and friends who seem busy.
- ▣ Want to protect family from some of the emotional pain.
- ▣ Believe that asking for help is a sign of failure.
- ▣ Want to protect the dignity or privacy of the person you care for.
- ▣ Were asked by the person you care for not to involve others.
- ▣ Are upholding your wedding vows, believing that your commitment was 'for better or worse'.

Asking for and accepting the help of family and friends is not a sign of failure or of disrespecting your wedding vows. Caring is an important job - one that can sometimes involve round-the-clock care and support, which would never be expected in a paid job. Where possible, sharing the care with family and friends can ensure that you look after the person you care for while looking after yourself too.

What if family seem reluctant to help?

Sometimes family members will be reluctant to help. This may be because of busy work and family lives or the sheer number of commitments they have at that particular time.

Sometimes though, this 'busy-ness' is a way of keeping their mind off family concerns. They may actually be quite worried and want to help out but may not know what to do or how to ask. When confronted with a chronic health condition or disability, some people just don't know what to say.

Here are some suggestions for getting family involved:

- ▣ Talk openly about caring - the rewards and challenges.
- ▣ Don't try to protect your family - tell them how you feel.
- ▣ Try to stay calm when talking with your family. They may not yet see things the way you do - it will take time.
- ▣ Let them know that help is welcome - it's not interference.
- ▣ Be upfront and ask your family to help.
- ▣ Name some things that your family could help with at times that they are available, like evenings or weekends. For example:
 - ▣ Helping with the bedtime routine three times a week.
 - ▣ Taking the person you care for on a weekend outing.
 - ▣ Taking the person you care for to a routine appointment.
 - ▣ Cooking extra meals for you to freeze.
 - ▣ Helping with the garden or maintenance of the home.

*"For a long time I did it all on my own.
When I finally got up the courage to ask, the help was there."*

Tips from other carers on getting family involved

- ▣ Go gently but be persistent. It may take time.
- ▣ This is not your job exclusively - it's your right to ask for help.
- ▣ If the person you care for doesn't want others involved, bargain with them. Try to agree on getting help with some tasks.
- ▣ If your family does get involved, don't expect that they'll do things your way. Make suggestions and then trust them.

Further information:

- ▣ The [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) (ph: 1800 242 636*) for information, support and advice on issues relating to caring for a family member or friend. You can also request the above information sheets be sent to you - or 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