

What to do when your family member doesn't want help

Resistance - it's often about independence

It's not uncommon for older people to resist the help offered by family or to decline the use of support services that are available. Some people will even resist seeing their GP when they're unwell.

When talking to older people about this, some believe that accepting the help of others will reduce their independence. This is partly true. When family, friends or support services start taking over tasks, older people can start to feel useless.

Look for opportunities to assist your family member with tasks that are becoming difficult, but try not to take over all of the responsibility. This way you'll be helping them to maintain their independence and feel in control of their life.

Other reasons for resistance

Your family member may have a number of reasons for refusing the help offered by others. By understanding some of these reasons, you will be able to talk openly with your family member about their fears or concerns.

*"George said, 'We're not old enough yet.'
I know he really meant that he's not ready to accept it."*

Reasons for resistance might include:

- ▣ denial about being 'old enough' to need help;
- ▣ wanting to cover up the loss of skills or abilities;
- ▣ fear of becoming dependent on others;
- ▣ fear of a loss of privacy;
- ▣ discomfort at the thought of having strangers in their home; and
- ▣ concern about the costs of support services.

Advice for families dealing with resistance

If your family member has the capacity to make decisions for themselves (check with their GP if unsure of this), they have the right to choose whether or not they will accept help.

This choice may involve them taking some risks, which you may or may not be comfortable with. There are two things to remember.

First, we all take risks - everyday. Reducing these risks where possible is the key. Second, if your family member does refuse assistance you are not automatically required to 'fill the gap'. The person you care for needs to be aware of the implications of the choice they make.

Talking to the person you care for about your concerns is the first step. Here are some suggestions for how to do this.

- ▣ Try to look at the situation from their perspective.
- ▣ Talk about their concerns - listen to their views and reasoning.
- ▣ Gently but directly let them know of your concerns.
- ▣ Acknowledge their frustrations, fears and anxieties.
- ▣ Give them choices or options in regard to the help available.
- ▣ Encourage them to 'try it out'. The level of help can be increased later when they feel more comfortable with the new arrangements.



Helpful tips from carers and families

- ▣ Pick the right time to talk to your family member. Avoid times that are tense or heated.
- ▣ Ask others who might have some influence to express their concern - perhaps the GP or a good friend.
- ▣ Start getting other family members involved by talking openly to them about your concerns.
- ▣ Be persistent - and patient! Don't try to tackle it all in one day.
- ▣ Talk about getting help in order to maintain their independence.
- ▣ Discuss your own need for help and support, as a carer.
- ▣ Try to see the funny side of it if you can. Humour can help.

*"I said, 'Gosh Mum, I'm not talking about a chaperone!
I'm just suggesting we get a little help.'
She smiled briefly, then gruffly said she'd give it a try."*

Further information:

- ▣ The [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) - ph: 1800 242 636*. Information, support and advice for people 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