

Nothing in our lives prepares us for the challenge of eldercare. Many times, the whole issue is ignored until it reaches crisis level, and then, family members often hit the panic and stress buttons simultaneously.

Avoiding family

By Carol Edwards, RN



Although it would be nice, the same “rules” to make other decisions do not usually apply to parent care. For a start, you and your parent may both avoid discussing the situation. Your relationship with your parents and your history of past conflicts or different opinions can further compound the issue. The situation can also cause conflict between siblings, who have enjoyed complete harmony for most of their lives.

Barriers to resolution

Denial. On the part of both the child and the elder person. The elder person is gradually finding that tasks that were once easy have become difficult and doesn't want to discuss the situation with the children. Oftentimes, the child is too occupied with their own life (and doesn't have a degree in psychology!)

Money. This is always the deciding factor on the care that can be provided for the elder person. Do they have sufficient funds to maintain them in their home? Or will the parent decide on their own accord to move to a retirement or nursing home.

Moving. Caution! This often seems to be the best solution as the parent will be cared for in an appropriate environment while aging with others. However, sometimes the elder person ends up isolated within the home because others die or deteriorate around them. Other times, a parent is required to move when they deteriorate themselves, often at a time in their life when moving is the least favourable action. As long as absolutely possible, consideration should be given to keeping the elder person at home and moving directly to a nursing home when more care is needed.



Lack of information. Doctors, nurses and other health care professionals don't always know all of the options. Family members are often uninformed about the real condition of their

loved one and may make a decision in the absence of good, correct information.

There is often no plan or blueprint for preventative long-term care unless a professional is hired to personally organize and facilitate an individual's care and comfort.



conflict

“Growing old is mandatory. Growing up is optional.”

Chilli Davis

For help, you turn to the older person's family doctor. Because of the new privacy laws, they won't speak without the older person present or they may not have the answers that you need.

Suddenly, life becomes complex. The good news is that your parent-care situation is resolvable with time, patience and understanding. As a geriatric care manager, I often help resolve issues while balancing the rights of the older person, the

responsibilities of the adult children and the terms of the power of attorney. Below are a few “barriers to resolutions” and a few solutions that I've learned along the way.

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Lack of time. Most families are absorbed with their own concerns – work, kids and other issues – at a time when their parents also need help. Few have the time, but many want it to be done right!

The family “expert.” It's hard to believe but the family “expert” does exist.

Unfortunately, the expert's attitudes are often based on another family member's misinformation or lack of trust in the system, because of a negative experience. There



are also family members who comment on the elder person's situation after piecing together information from others.

Finally, the family member

who is too immersed in the care of the parent and who is unable to share the task with anyone can potentially need help (even though they often don't know.) ●

Easy-to-implement solutions

- Find a neutral party who understands and empathizes with the elder person and who has the knowledge to suggest the best strategy.
- Prioritize the issues and make a plan of implementation.
- Ask a care or case manager to provide you with several alternatives. Attach a cost to each plan.
- Establish who the primary decision maker is. Default to their instructions. Decode what the family will do and what professionals will be paid to provide.
- Establish an excellent rapport with the elder person. Plan a strategy of communicating with the elder person with the approval of everyone.
- Ask a professional, such as a care manager, to set your loved one on a path to preventative health care and to monitor your parent's progress, to provide the family with a monthly written report (by e-mail or fax) and to obtain the co-operation of other service providers, including the family doctor and any government or private agency that may become involved.
- Ask for counseling and support for family members as required.