

Elder Care: How to Help Your Parents Manage

It's a decision most adults dread: having to take over the financial and day-to-day living decisions for parents who can no longer manage on their own. When caring for your parents, you may need to plan on three levels: managing finances, making health care decisions, and making sure their daily household needs are met. Finding qualified experts who can advise you in these areas may make it easier to manage the situation.

Managing Finances

If your parents currently are able to communicate, try to initiate a conversation about how they would like their money to be managed. Rather than telling them what to do, be clear that you would like to help and to make sure that their wishes are met. Access to bank and brokerage statements, insurance policies, and other financial documents may help you to safeguard your parents' assets.

If your parents work with a financial advisor, try to arrange a joint meeting where all parties can review the situation. If you pay your parents' bills and manage their checkbook, arranging for direct deposit of Social Security or pension benefits, as well as electronic delivery of recurring bills, could expedite the process.

Arranging for Health Care

If your parents are mentally competent, ask them about consulting a lawyer who can draft a health care proxy, a legal document designating you (or another person) to make decisions about medical care when they are no longer able to do so. If your parents have opinions about end-of-life care, their wishes can be incorporated into a living will, another legal document.

Even without these documents, the medical establishment is likely to look to you or other siblings to make decisions about health care, which could include arranging for long-term care or making end-of-life decisions. As part of this process, determine the type of medical insurance that your parents have and what it covers.

Overseeing Daily Living Activities

If your parents are able to remain in their home, you may need to consider helping them to manage medication, to conduct daily tasks such as bathing or meal preparation, and to make arrangements for assistance with household chores. A visiting nurse and home care agency may provide assistance in these areas.

You may want to consider consulting a Professional Geriatric Care Manager, a professional who may help arrange for home care, provide crisis intervention, and help you identify solutions to potential problems. You can learn more at www.caremanager.org.

Managing a parent's affairs can be complicated, but arranging for support from qualified people may help you care for parents in a way that meets their needs and does not create too much stress on you.