



Employee Assistance Program

The Conscientious Caregiver: Making Plans for Your Aging Relative

When an aging relative becomes ill and unable to care for him or herself without assistance, many people are caught off guard. They are not prepared for this significant life change and all that it may entail. They might not have thought they would ever be in the position of caring for an aging relative.

Recent research from the AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving suggests otherwise. According to these organizations, about 34.2 million Americans have provided unpaid care to an adult age 50 or older in the last 12 months.

Of course no one can predict the future to determine how much care a loved one may need. All the same, there are steps you can take to make this transition easier for everyone involved. You can start by making sure you know the answers to some important questions regarding how your relative's medical and financial affairs will be managed in event that he or she needs a caregiver:

- Do I know what my elder's wishes would be if she or he were unable to make medical decisions?
- Do I know where important documents, such as insurance, wills, or financial statements are located?
- Do I have the authority to take over his or her finances if the elder in my care can no longer manage money?
- Has the elder set up legally binding documents stating his or her wishes about health care decisions?

Source: PBS Caregiver's Handbook, www.pbs.org/wgbh/caringforyourparents/handbook

After addressing these administrative matters, you might also want to consider following the five steps outlined in the AARP's Prepare to Care guide: 1) Prepare to talk; 2) Form your team; 3) Assess your needs; 4) Make a plan; 5) Take action.

An integral part of each step is communicating clearly and making sure all those who wish to be involved in the development of the plan are included.

Most studies on aging suggest that it's a matter of when – not if – you'll need to care for an aging relative. Taking the time to be a conscientious caregiver will serve you and your whole family well during that process.

Your EAP can offer you support and guidance as you plan to care for an aging relative or help you identify resources if you're already doing so.



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