

Caring for Your Parents from a Distance

Caregiving for parents from a distance has unique challenges. Often, one parent begins caring for the other. Then the caregiving parent needs help providing care, or they both need to receive care. That's where you come in.

Ways to approach the topic with the caregiving parent

- You have a lot to deal with.
[validates your parents' experience]
- I want to help. Could we talk about it together?
[gains their permission/eases hesitancy; allows you to gauge any resistance]
- Let's schedule a time to start thinking about things together.
[is collaborative, not controlling, so may be better received]
- What does the perfect situation look like?
[reduces assumptions by all; allows paring back from perfect to meet reality]

Questions to ask the caregiving parent

- What's your most pressing need?
[can reduce stress and is a one-step-at-a-time approach for older adults' slower thinking/processing]
- What would help most in the future?
[helps you start taking actions, like preparing to sell a home that no longer serves their needs]
- What's the most overwhelming part?
[acknowledges and validates their feelings without your parents having to express them]
- What's your greatest fear?
[helps everyone understand that fear often drives decisions]

Find out what documents are in place

- Do you have an attorney and legal documents?
[to ensure care wishes are followed]
- Do you have a financial advisor?
[the level of financial resources drives many decisions]
- How can I access financial information if I need to care for both of you?
[online access to all accounts enables you to pay bills and manage money as needed]

Find local help

Ask these questions at the local hospital:

- Is family caregiver support available?
[is there a center or a dedicated focus by a hospital department or outside organization?]
- Is there a hospital-based care manager who can help us?
[do they conduct geriatric evaluations; can you arrange home health, other supports?]

- Is there a geriatric care manager or hospital-based care manager I can pay privately?
[can that person actively manage hand-n care or just oversee day-to-day care by others?]
- How do other families handle this type of situation? How would you handle it?
[how can I learn from other people's caregiving journeys?]

Ask about these topics at a local faith-based organization:

- Are there volunteer services available?
[is help available for driving to appointments, doing errands, grocery shopping?]
- Do you make spiritual wellness checks at home that can uncover additional needs?
[my parents may be more open to an outside supportive perspective; my input could feel judgmental]

Create a family emergency plan for you and for your parents

- What's the first thing your parents will do when there's a medical emergency?
[ask about past and potential emergencies; put things in place beforehand; pack a go bag]
- Create a plan for managing home life and work life
[walk through a faux scenario; put things in place beforehand; pack a go bag]

Especially when you're an only child, ask your parents who can help locally

- Do they have siblings or friends who can help, locally or who can visit?
[mention opportunities to bond; consider options that help each other to avoid feeling dependent]
- What are the most sensitive areas of their need/decline, so you can approach the situation accordingly?
[common areas are physical, cognitive, mental health/depression, appearances to outsiders, isolation]
- What would you do if I needed help?
[this approach can open the door to accepting help themselves]

Get help for yourself

- Identify your support circle
[counselor, caregiving coach, friends, clergy, coworkers]
- Join an online support group for long-distance family caregivers
[[Alzheimer's Association group](#) for long-distance caregivers of someone living with dementia]
- Join a support group that's local to the area where your parents live
- Have things to look forward to daily, weekly, and monthly
[this is a must for your mental health]

Find the joy — yours and theirs

- What do your parents want their quality of life to include?
- What do they want their legacy to be?
[changes the focus from negative to positive]
- How can you share in creating or reinvigorating that legacy?
[can open the door to accepting help]

For more information, look for “Managing long-distance caregiving” on our [More Resources page](#).