

Family Fact Sheet

Caregiving: Scenarios and Strategies (Part 3 of 4) Andrew B. Crocker – Gerontology Health Specialist



When we think about caregiving, often the image that comes to mind is that of a wife caring for her husband or a husband caring for his wife. However, in many cases, the caregiver may not be related at all to the care recipient. In some cases, the caregiver may not only reside in a different home but may live in an entirely different state. In this article we will look at different scenarios for caregiving and provide effective strategies for managing those

situations.

Many times, caregiving is an all consuming, full-time job. However, more than two-thirds of caregivers in the United States are employed either part- or full-time. These caregivers not only have a commitment to their families but also to their employers. While some employers provide support for caregivers that may include referral services or support groups, the vast majority of employers do not provide any services for caregivers. The following recommendations may help ease the stress of the employed caregiver and also benefit the employer by helping maintain adequate productivity:

- Talk to your employer. He or she may be more understanding and accommodating of your situation.
- Check into alternative work scheduling. Your employer may be able to offer a schedule that allows you to better handle your work-life balance.

- The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows for up to 12 weeks per year of leave to care for family members without threatening job security or losing benefits.

Many times a caregiver may assist with caregiving from a distance. In some cases, the care recipient may still be able to function well on his own but may need a reminder when it comes to taking medicines or other activities that may be addressed over the phone. In other cases, the caregiver may be supervising another person who is caring for a loved one. One of the hardest decisions when caring for someone at a distance is deciding when a phone call is not enough. Frequent trips may frustrate a caregiver, especially if the situation to be addressed could be handled from a distance. Some tips to help with the decision to travel:

- Gather information about community resources, friends, family and local support systems that can help when you cannot be there. A good place to start looking for community information is Eldercare Locator. You may reach Eldercare Locator by calling 800.677.1116 or on the internet at <http://www.eldercare.gov>.
- Make a list of health providers, medications, health history, insurance information and other things that may be needed which you may give over the phone.
- When you do travel to see your care recipient, assess the situation, anticipate and act on potential problems before they arise.
- Get a local phone book and make note of important telephone numbers.

Caregiving often brings about the image of a frail elder who cannot care for himself or herself. Remember that a caregiver may also be a grandparent rearing a grandchild or an uncle caring for a niece – in other words, the care recipient may be a child. In the year 2000, more than six million children under the age of 18 lived in a household that was headed by a relative other than a parent. Issues that arise when caring for a child may be very different from caring for an adult, such as enrollment in school, helping with homework and consent for medical

treatment, to name a few. Legal issues regarding guardianship or adoption may arise as well as securing funding to help with caregiving. Resources are available to aid in this type of caregiving. Texas Cooperative Extension has a website, "Grandparents Raising Grandkids," that may help address some of the issues of kinship caregiving. Go to <http://grandparentsraisinggrandkids.tamu.edu> for more information.

Different caregiving scenarios and issues surrounding them are as numerous as the number of caregivers themselves. Help is available to ensure that your caregiving experience is as streamlined and beneficial as possible. An excellent place to start looking for help is your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). In Texas, you may find the nearest Area Agency Aging on the web at <http://www.tdoa.state.tx.us/Services/AAALocatorMap.htm> or by calling 800.252.9240.