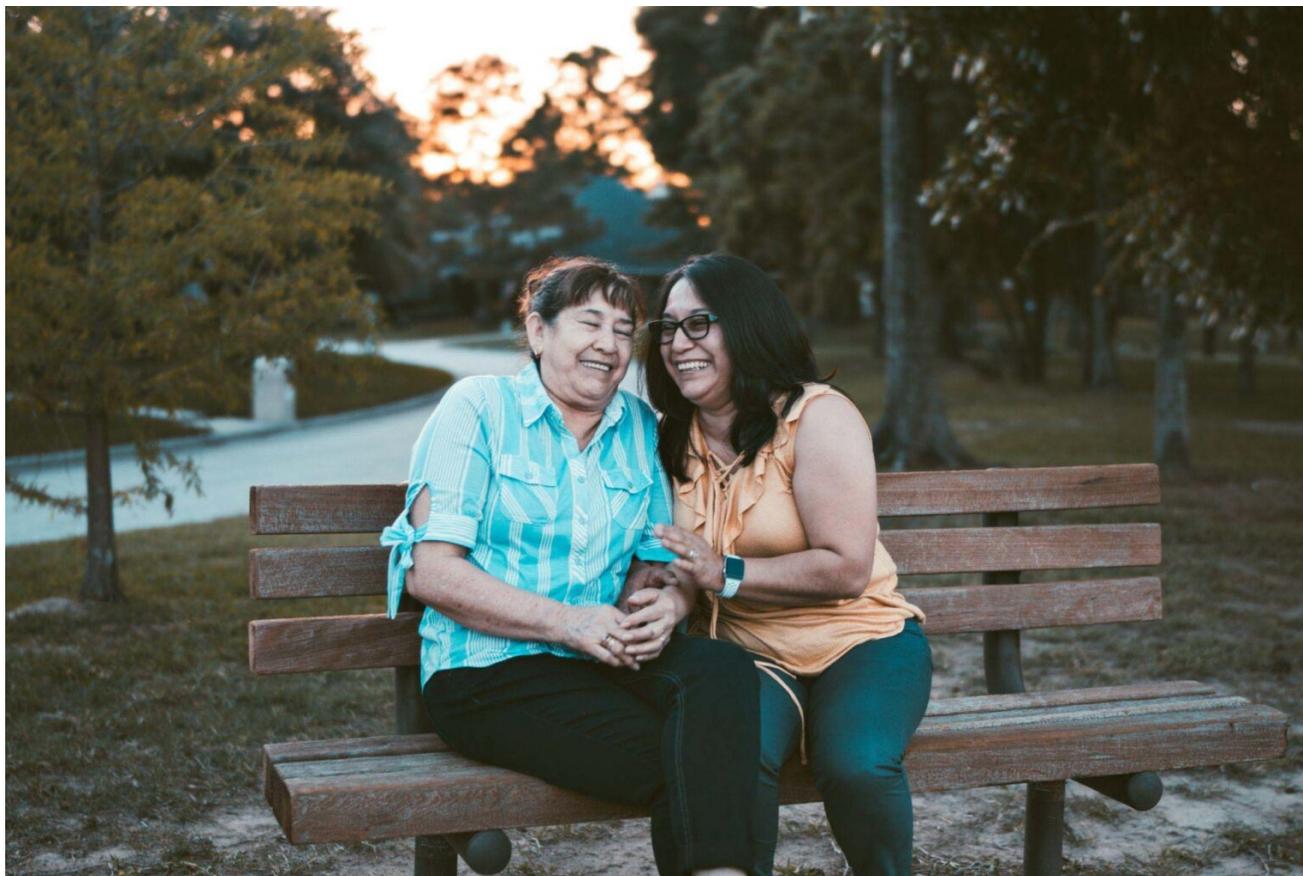


Building a Caregiving Support Team

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While many caregivers find their experience purposeful and rewarding, it comes with responsibilities that can cause stress and negatively impact a caregiver's wellness. As many as one in four caregivers report that they find it difficult to care for their own health. One in five report financial strain. Six in ten manage jobs while caregiving, and the majority have experienced at least one work-related impact. Finding assistance to accomplish tasks, free up time and resources, and lend emotional support can help alleviate some of this stress.

The caregiving role

Caregivers typically provide about 24 hours of care per week. Nearly all caregivers help with instrumental activities of daily living (managing finances and medications, cooking, housekeeping) while 60% help with activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, using the bathroom). In addition, 58% of caregivers help with medical/nursing tasks (giving an injection, providing wound care). Overall, caregiving is a big undertaking, particularly for those who also work part or full-time, manage their own household, or are raising a family.

Some caregivers provide assistance to a loved one in the care recipient's home or in a long-term care or senior living community. Other caregivers live with their loved one. Regardless of the circumstances, many feel crunched for time or stressed by the myriad of responsibilities. Creating a support circle can help. For those in particularly demanding or intense care situations — like those who have no other family members in the area, live with the care recipient, work part or full-time, or care for someone with dementia — finding support is essential.

Building your own support team

Often people in a caregiver's network are willing to help but may not realize it is needed or don't want to "step on toes." By creating your own support team, you may find the best success at lifting some of the stress and shaping a more manageable situation. Start by making a list of those you could reach out to for help. This might include family members, friends, neighbors, or members from your church or other organizations that you are connected to. These individuals can help accomplish tasks and provide emotional support.

Next, create a list of tasks that if removed from your plate would free up some of your time. In addition, talk to your loved one about where they need specific help. Tasks might include providing a ride to a medical appointment, picking up medications at the pharmacy, calling or visiting weekly, cooking meals, dealing with the insurance company, handling medical bills, and communicating with friends and family during an illness or hospitalization. People are more likely to say yes to a specific ask, or even better, a choice of tasks from which to choose.

Importantly, once you have delegated the tasks, let go of them and give yourself permission to do something for your wellness. This might mean taking care of your own health by staying up to date with your doctors' appointments, meeting a friend for coffee, or heading to the gym.

Finding assistance outside of your inner circle

Even after reaching out to friends and family, you may need additional support in place. Ask the doctors, nurses, and social workers who work with your loved one for help accessing local resources. They might help you identify volunteer organizations that provide caregiver services. Other services might require a fee — like transportation or a cleaning service — but may be well worth the cost. Online grocery shopping may also prove helpful. With a minimal upcharge, it can help make efficient use of your time.



Another helpful service for those who are seeking a long-term care community for their loved one is an elder care consultant. Understanding the long-term care industry can be overwhelming for a newcomer, particularly one in crisis. (This is often when a family member seeks long-term care.) Part of the role of elder care consultants is to educate those seeking long-term care — often the caregivers.

If your loved one is aging in place at their home or living in yours, a time may come when you need more comprehensive help for an extended period of time. Maybe you need to tend to your own health because of an illness or hospitalization. Or maybe it is because you need to leave town for a business trip or a much needed vacation. Respite care is available for these situations. A friend, relative, or volunteer may be available to give you this break. If not, services exist for caregivers. At Luther Manor, respite care is provided in The Courtyards (assisted living) for between 7 and 28 days. Those who stay have access to health care, therapy, enrichment activities, and dining services. For more information, call 414-464-3880 or email live@luthermanor.org.

Emotional support for the caregiver

Aside from getting help with daily activities, you will also want to consider finding emotional support for yourself. For some this might come from a friend, a religious leader, or a counselor. Others might find a support group helpful. Caregiving is a very unique life experience, and a support group enables people who share this lived experience to connect.

Look for in-person support groups at faith communities, hospitals, disease associations, and social service agencies. Virtual support groups are also plentiful. For example AARP hosts a caregivers discussion group on Facebook.

Asking for help is not always easy. But by prioritizing your own self-care, you are actually improving your capacity as a caregiver. Many caregiving experts compare it to putting on an oxygen mask on an airplane. You need to secure your own oxygen mask first, before you are able to assist others.

