



Caregiver's Answers, Topics, and Helpful Information

In an effort to continually assist caregivers in their search for pertinent information regarding eldercare, our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator addresses topics of most frequently asked questions via **Caregiver's Answers, Topics and Helpful Information (CATHI)**. Additionally, caregivers are also invited to e-mail individual questions to the Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org.

Sibling Rivalry or Revelry

Coping with a parent's illness is hard enough. But it is common in families, that resentment, guilt and past problems, and hurt feelings among sibling's can amp up the stress level. "Every issue from the original family can come back into play," says Francine Russo, author of *They're My Parents Too: How Siblings Can Survive Their Parents' Aging without Driving Each Other Crazy*. "And as the parent's conditions worsens, the feelings get more intense."

How to escape old rivalries in a crisis and come together as the common good?

If you're the Sibling Who Lives Nearby...

Understand That You All Accept Things at Different Places: Someone who lives close to their parents and sees them frequently may be more aware of their declining health. So, when they receive bad news, it may come as a bigger shock to siblings who are more distant. The opposite may also occur; a sibling who visits after an absence may pick up on a new symptom that you have grown used to without "seeing" it.

Talk About Who Wants to Know What, and When: When your parent's health reaches a crisis or decision point, when do your siblings want to know or be contacted? Do they want to be included in consults with the doctor and social workers, or is a conference call enough? Or are they comfortable with you making all the decisions for your parent and passing along the information?

Some distant siblings may want to be informed every time there is a new test result or a medication change, while some siblings may find this amount of involvement overwhelming. Try your best to respect your siblings wishes, but first you need to know their wishes and have that conversation with them.

Consider Bringing in a Neutral Party to aid Decision-Making: A family meeting or conference call with a social worker, geriatric care manager, or hospice coordinator helps everyone feel included. This objective third party can lay out the realities and suggest ways to work together. “A professional who’s experienced in family relations can keep any sibling issues that are coming up from overwhelming the discussion,” Russo suggests.

Share the Care (Even When it’s Hard): For some hands-on caregivers, it can be difficult to step back and let others in. If you start to feel resistant, ask yourself why. Is it because you are worried that others are less capable? Because you’re seeking validation from a parent who’s always withheld your approval?

“It takes a lot of soul searching to examine your motivations, which may not even be conscious,” Russo Says. But if you can let go of your past needs, you will be able to help accept help in the present moment.

If You’re the Sibling Who Lives Far Away...

Trust the Messenger: Beware of “distrusting the messenger,” the phenomenon where a healthcare professional delivers difficult news to a local sibling, who in turn communicates what they have been told and is promptly dismissed. “Fear, combined with old family patterns, can lead us to have responses like ‘oh, she exaggerates,’ or ‘They are a drama queen’, “ Russo says.

Unfortunately, responding with doubts or skeptical questions puts the messenger on the defense. So, if you find yourself starting to react this way, take a deep breath and remind yourself that your sibling is doing the best he or she can with a thankless job. If you need to hear the news directly from the doctor, ask to do so. Otherwise treat the communicator with trust.

Don’t Take “I’m Fine” for an Answer: “Most people have trouble saying they need help, so you may need to probe harder than asking ‘Are you okay?’ or ‘What Can I do?’” Russo says. A few ideas:

- Send small gifts, particularly those geared towards stress relief and self-care: A gift certificate for massage, fresh fruit, a relaxing CD.
- Treat your sibling to a nice dinner when you are in town.

- Time your visits so that you can give your sibling a break away.
- Help pay for respite care or your parents other financial needs.

Let your Sibling Vent: An empathetic ear may be what your siblings needs the most. “Just be available to listen when your sibling tells you how awful their day was, you are making an enormous contribution to their emotional health,” Russo says. Try to avoid the pitfall known as “anger-guilt gridlock.” It is natural to hear your sibling’s complaints as accusations and go straight to guilt. But that is not their goal. They just want their feelings validated, by setting aside your reaction, you can give that to your sibling.

Focus on the Ultimate goal: Your Parent’s Care: Stop tension in its tracks by reminding yourself that right now, the focus should be on your parent, not on your own drama. Concentrate on your shared concern for you parent. That is good for everyone’s well-being.

This article was adapted from *Sibling Rivalry or Revelry* by Melanie Haiken, Touching Lives, 2018.

****If you would like to join our mailing list to learn more about programs and services available to you contact our Family Caregiver Support Coordinator at caregiver2@senior-resources-guilford.org***

For referrals to community organizations in Guilford County that assist older adults and caregivers, contact Senior Resources of Guilford’s SeniorLine at (336) 884-6981 in High Point, all other areas (336) 333-6981 or the Caregiver Support Coordinator, at (336) 373-4816 in Greensboro or (336) 883-3586 in High Point.



North Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program
Completing the Care