

# TOP TIPS FOR CARING FOR AN OLDER PERSON

Welcome to this guide on how to support and care for an older person as a care partner (i.e. as a relative, friend, or neighbour). We explore *five approaches* to help you navigate the uncertainties and challenges of caregiving while ensuring the best possible support for the person you care for.

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This resource was created from a research project with expert carers for older relatives. It is intended to support you as you listen to what matters most to the older person and work to promote their interests.

# 1

## START PLANNING

Supporting an older person can involve dealing with the unknown and unforeseen challenges. While you cannot prepare for everything, some planning can help you to handle the unexpected. Here are some tips that might help you as a caregiver:

### Establish a main contact

Select a paid caregiver, such as the GP who is responsible for the health care of the person you care for, as the main point of contact. Work with them to create a care plan with regular reviews and updates.

Name of main contact:

Role:

Telephone:

Email:

### Look after yourself

If you become unwell, this will impact on you as well as the quality of care you can provide. You have other roles and identities besides being a caregiver. With only so much time and energy, consider prioritising the unique support you provide and what can be dealt with by others.

### Identify support groups

Connect with local and national caregiver organisations (e.g. [Carers UK](#)) and support groups to learn about your financial and legal entitlements as an care partner, as well as other forms of support.

### Participate in care team meetings

Discuss with the older person you care for whether they would like for you to be involved in care team meetings to represent their interests. You have a unique understanding of their needs and wishes.

### Discuss future wishes

Talk to the person you care for about their wishes for the coming months and years and, as appropriate, support them to plan for their future legal, health, and financial needs through lasting powers of attorney, advance statements, and/or advance decisions.

# 2

## BUILDING CONNECTIONS

When caring for an older person, you may not always have control over who else is involved in their care. However, you can choose to work with specific individuals to create strong connections around the person you're caring for. These connections can support the providing of care where the person feels most comfortable. Here are some ways to build your connections:

### Support from family members

Involving family members as active partners in an older person's care can be incredibly beneficial e.g. getting their help with organising shopping or providing respite. Regular discussions with family about the person's care and any changes in their situation can reduce anxieties and improve overall care. Keeping a shared written record of activities and decisions made with an older person can be a good way to support communication and joined up care.

### Link into the local community

If possible, build your connections around the older person in their neighbourhood and community. This can include friends, family, neighbours, paid caregivers, faith and spiritual groups, and voluntary or community support services. By building these connections, you can support a more holistic approach to care for the older person and potentially reduce the load on yourself, psychologically as well as physically.

### Fill care gaps

If you notice gaps in regular care that cause concern, discuss this with the older person and explore options for alternative caregiving arrangements. This might involve using paid caregivers, which may require conversations with a GP for their support to connect with adult social care services. These conversations may be challenging and might not lead to immediate changes, but ongoing dialogue can help address important issues more effectively over time. You may also wish to consider speaking to your employer about how they can accommodate your caregiving responsibilities.

# 3

## SETTING EXPECTATIONS

When you are supporting an older person, it can be helpful to set expectations with paid caregivers. This can support the building of lasting relationships and establish a shared understanding of your role, and boundaries, in providing care right from the start. Here are some top tips you may find helpful when first speaking with new paid caregivers:

### Emphasise values

Make it clear that trust, respect, and active involvement are vital for you and the person you're caring for.

### Partnership in care

Any caregiving should be a partnership involving the older person, yourself, other care partners (like relatives, friends, or neighbours), and any paid caregivers. All caregivers should share essential information and be open to learning from others to enhance the care provided to the older person.

### Regular check-ins

Express your desire for regular check-ins and your commitment to providing feedback on both positive and negative aspects of the care.

### Encourage joint discussion and shared decision-making

You understand the needs and wishes of the person you care for more than most. It's important to ensure that the older person is at the centre of any decision-making and that care plans are feasible for everyone involved. For example, you might say,

*"Hello my name is [X], and I care for [Y]. How can we best support [Y] to have an equal voice in this meeting and make sure the care plan is feasible for all of us?"*

# 4

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Difficulties and challenges can arise when working with other caregivers. Below are some top tips that may help:

### The first minute matters

Recognise that the first opportunity that you get to speak can set the tone for the entire interaction. Ask yourself, “What key message do I need to get across to achieve a positive outcome?”

### Consider the older person’s wishes

Before reaching out, think about and, if the situation allows, discuss directly with the older person their care preferences and priorities. These can help guide your approach to the situation and your key message.

### Provide relevant information

If you have background knowledge about the situation, highlight key aspects of the person’s medical history, current symptoms, and the circumstances leading to the current situation. Presenting the situation as a story, including these details, can facilitate a more effective response. In other circumstances, a one-page summary or wall poster can be used to highlight what matters most to the older person.

# UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES

Caring for an older person can come with its share of unexpected challenges, which can require creative solutions on the spot. These situations can be uncertain, leaving you wondering how to respond and who to contact. Here are some top tips to help you navigate the three key questions: **Why**, **Who**, and **What**:

## Why is this happening?

Understand the cause of the situation.

*Example: An older person has had some recent trips to Accident and Emergency from increased falling at home.*

## Who do I contact?

Identify the people who need to be involved to address the situation and who also needs to be informed about it. This can include friends, family, neighbours, paid caregivers, and voluntary or community support services.

*Example: You discuss this with family members and with the older person. With the older person's consent, you also contact their GP who makes a referral to an occupational therapist.*

## What do we do?

Determine the actions and responses needed, involving the older person, and other relevant people you have identified, such as relevant family members and paid care providers.

*Example: With agreement from the older person, you and other family members support them to remove some of the clutter from their home. The occupational therapist assesses the older person's home and makes recommendations and identifies equipment that will help the older person to be able to carry out daily activities around their home more easily, supporting their independence.*

For serious or urgent challenges, you can contact NHS 111 or dial 999. For less serious concerns, GPs, District Nurses, Community Pharmacists, Occupational Therapists, and Physiotherapists can offer valuable support and connect you to additional services. You may wish to contact your key contact as identified in [Section 1](#).

Handling unexpected challenges can be stressful, but once resolved, you can develop a strategy to cope with future occurrences. These strategies will be specific to each situation and might involve changes in your current care approach. For example:

When deciding what to do you may wish to use and keep returning to these **guiding questions for decision-making**:

- **What** decision fits best with what matters most to the person I care for?
- **What** decision will give the person I care for the best possible quality of life and dignity?
- **What** will this decision do to support the independence of the person I am caring for?
- **How** will this decision impact on the person I care for and everyone else involved in providing their care?



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[surrey.ac.uk](http://surrey.ac.uk)



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