

Helping our Aging Parents

By Susan Feldman, Community Relations

BrightStar Care.

www.brightstarcare.com/roseville

916-781-6500

Every day, I talk with adult children seeking in-home care for their aging parents who are overwhelmed with the responsibility of raising their own families, maintaining their careers and being available for parent's changing needs like falls, medical appointments, cooking and household chores. They are trying to be everything to both generations and are exhausted.

If your aging parent could benefit from in home care such as: personal hygiene, walking assistance, toileting, dressing, medication reminders, meal preparation, light housekeeping, laundry and transportation but is reluctant to accept help, here are a few tips to consider:

Do the Research

By seeking out a qualified in-home care agency before talking with parents you'll come to the discussion prepared. An internet search for in-home care will result in a plethora of options. Another idea is to get a recommendation from their physician or faith community. Interview agencies on the phone, explain concerns/care needs and assess their ability to meet those needs with qualified caregivers.

The Doctor Said

There may be a sense of respect for what their personal and trusted physician says. Talk to the physician's office ahead of time or send a letter explaining the situation. If the doctor said they need help, your parent may take this to heart.

Validate their Concerns

The decision to accept outside help is a big step. Most of us value our independence and privacy so allowing help is acknowledgement of increasing dependence and decline. Be sensitive to this milestone. Remind parents that assistance from a caregiver will not replace family visits but preserve the parent-child relationship, allowing for special time together rather than task-filled visits. Most seniors prefer a professional to assist with toileting and personal hygiene than their kids.

Safety

Having a "stranger" come into the home raises questions of security. Check the agency's hiring practices, verifying that they do background checks, provide bonding, liability and workers compensation insurance. Reassure them that it's safe.

Part of the Process

Suggest that a representative from the agency visit to share about their services, learn about care needs, do an assessment and home safety check and answer any questions. There is no cost for this and puts a friendly face to the whole idea of help. Rather than being told what they need, keep parents in the decision-making process.

Paint the Picture of Care

Draw attention to times outside help would be valuable such as the need for transportation to appointments when adult children are working, assisting with meals and medication reminders between visits from kids, routine care that might prevent an aging spouse-caregiver from injury, fall or decline.

Also, “what if...” scenarios such as “what if your family caregiver can’t do it anymore, gets ill or goes on vacation.”

Long Term Care Insurance

If they have LTC insurance remind them that it is a “use it or lose it” type of insurance and using it now before a catastrophic event would be sensible both financially and physically. By using half of the monthly allowance, they can have care for twice as long. They determine how much of the benefit they chose to use. And many insurances stop charging the premium while the policy is in use.

Plant the Seeds

Continue to bring up the idea of extra help, point out their friends and neighbors that do successfully have help and times when another member of their “care team” would be a benefit. It may take time but with patience they may warm to the idea of a kind, compassionate helper.

The Triggering Event

Often the triggering factor that propels the discussion into action is a scare like a fall that could have been a broken hip, a minor driving incident that could have been terrible or confusion that could have resulted in harm. Sometimes the triggering event happening to a friend or neighbor is enough to instill action. In any case, continue to suggest outside help with love and concern.

Accessing the Information

There are really no “oversight” agencies for non-medical in-home care providers at the present time. It is recommended to call the local Senior Information & Assistance provider for assistance as they are the keeper of the resources and seen as the gatekeeper for senior services. In Placer County, the contact would be the Seniors First organization; (530) 889-9500.

Medicare.gov has a searchable database of nursing homes by zip code. SeniorAdvisor.com allows shoppers to search for records on a state by state basis and lists reviews of thousands of nursing homes throughout the country. ProPublica offers a comprehensive search engine and allows users to compare nursing homes based on deficiencies cited by regulators and penalties imposed within the last 3 years.

Some warning signs to watch for: a history of violations, high staff turnover, residents lack independence, lack of personal touches in the residents’ rooms (photos, decorations on the walls, etc.), are amenities and services accessible to residents present, and any feeling of uneasiness in your gut.

The views expressed here are those of Ms. Susan Feldman, and do not necessarily represent those of the Older Adult Advisory Commission or individual members.