



Making *Life Easier*™



WHY ME?

Dear Home Helpers,

My mother has a disabling and progressive disease and she cannot be left alone. I have had to take time off work to take care of her needs and now have the added responsibility of taking care of her house, errands and all aspects of her care. I am about to lose my job and emotionally I am at the breaking point.

I have two sisters who live in town and they do come to visit her once every two weeks but do not offer to help my mom in any way. They know everything that I am doing for her and I am resentful that they consider me the "chosen one" to take care of all Mom's needs. What can I do?

~ Mary

You're not alone. We find that this occurs in so many families where there is one sibling who ends up doing all or most of the care for an aging or ill parent. Often this creates so much stress and resentment between the siblings that grudges are often held for many years. Many children are now parenting for a second time.

For any number of reasons they end up taking care of their parents and even with all their brothers and sisters, they usually end up doing it by themselves. This can lead to a lot of hurt feelings, anger, feeling used, etc. In some cases, after a parent passes it's common for siblings to hold grudges and not speak to each other for years! If you understand "why" then it is easier to figure out how to solve problems. The following tips should help in opening up the lines of communication between family members.

Personality traits of the Do-All Sibling

A need to be recognized and accepted is a very common personality trait of the Do-All Sibling. Often this sibling is the peacemaker in the family, the one who would rather do things themselves rather than confront someone. The sibling that usually steps up to the plate is the sensitive one, the 'giver' within the family, the one with the 'good kid' label.

Understanding the mindset of your siblings

Out of sight, out of mind! Do they actually know how much you have been caring for your parents? Are they so wrapped up in their own family that they just assume all is OK because you have handled it as you always have with everything else?

Believe it or not, they may be feeling left out or resentful because in their mind, you are the "favorite" child. If you sense this then acknowledge how they feel, right or wrong. Feelings are still feelings and by allowing them to get it off their chest, it may open up the door to better cooperation. Often times the sibling who is the do-all sibling really has a greater need to be loved and accepted but it's viewed by the other siblings as competition.

Remember, it's unlikely that they are intentionally putting more burden and stress on you. They may need to spend a day in your shoes to really understand what is going on. If your sibling is a male, they need clear instructions rather than general ideas in order to "fix" things. They can't read your mind.

You have the right...

To ask for help

To make your needs known

To take care of yourself

To spend quality time with your own family

Where to start

Let's work on how best to communicate your needs. The best way to encourage someone to do something is a positive attitude. You'll need to schedule a family meeting at a time when everyone can attend. Before the meeting have a list of all duties, transportation needs, and care needs for your parent. The goal is to have each person choose which duties they will be in charge of and let them put it on the schedule. This will visually reinforce the needs. It would be a good idea to categorize them into the following:

Personal care needs

Transportation needs

Financial (Bills, paperwork etc.)

Domestic household needs

Yard work and home maintenance needs

*Bring a blank calendar to the meeting with large enough areas to enter in names/duties.

Tips on communicating your needs before the meeting

Try a positive approach such as, "Joe, you are so good at fixing things around the house and mom always appreciates you. I would like to put you in charge of..."

Try not to perpetuate the situation by complaining or exaggerating the issues because that will further distance yourself from your siblings. Instead, try to focus on the little things that they do and place value in those little steps and be appreciative for each little step. It will go along way to encourage more from them!

Positive vs. negative communication

Issue: Your sister forgot to take your mom to her hair appointment.

Example:

Negative: "You are so irresponsible and you always do this!"

Positive: "Her appointment was at 11:00 and now its 1:00. What can be done to make sure mom gets to her appointments?"

Example: Use "I" (your feelings) instead of "You" (their behavior)

Negative: "You only think about yourself!"

Positive: "I feel so much stress when I have to worry about mom getting to her appointments on time"

Be firm but pleasant in your tone.

Don't assume you know what they are thinking

Always allow them to give their point of view

Always find a compromise or a way that each of you can meet the needs of the other.

Address the issues, not the person.

Address the present, not the past! Over generalizing will cause more negativity and will stand in the way of resolution.

Many times we feel as if we are the only ones going through difficult situations. You need to have emotional support and a way to talk out your feelings. Seek out the help of a counselor who understands the needs of seniors and their families. It will help lift your spirits and provide more coping methods. Even a good friend is an alternative.

Home Helpers focuses on the family by addressing both the emotional and physical needs of each family. The office phones are transferred to either the owner or case manager 24/7. We are always happy to arrange additional or outside resources to meet each family's unique needs. Home Helpers is a smoke-free, drug-free agency.

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