

Challenges for Family Caregivers

by Karen Kaslow, RN, BSN | Jun 18, 2018 | Caregiver Support, Family Living, Sentinel Articles



Mom and Dad are generally slowing down. Perhaps the changes associated with aging are magnified by the presence of one or more chronic health conditions. A health crisis may have occurred, or the risk of a crisis is increasing. These situations may lead to an adult child gradually stepping in to fill the gaps, or being suddenly thrust into the role of caregiver. Regardless of the timeframe involved or the cause of a parent's increased dependence, the emotions, tasks, and decisions

associated with giving and receiving care can create challenges for families.

Some situations which create tension between caregiving family members are obvious while others are more subtle. Most of these situations fall into several general categories.

Finances: There is no getting around the endless possibilities which exist here. Squabbles may arise over who will take responsibility for overseeing the parents' finances when they are no longer able to handle this task themselves. If the parents have planned ahead and appointed a Power of Attorney, other family members may not agree with how the POA agent is managing the assets. Perhaps an adult child is living with the parent and not contributing to household expenses or assisting with the care of the home and/or parent; or the children are surprised to discover that the parent has given/loaned a significant sum of money to one child for whatever reason. Concerns about the cost of care, a parent's desire to leave an inheritance for children (or the children's desire to receive an inheritance), or the children's lack of knowledge about their parents' financial situation until a crisis arises also create stress which can lead to disagreements between siblings. Finances may also become more complicated if a second marriage exists, and whether or not assets were combined or kept separate.

Relationships: Family dynamics play an important role in the development and resolution of caregiving conflicts. The role reversal of a child needing to care for a parent may be emotionally uncomfortable. Siblings' relationships with each other and their parents as adults are often influenced by emotions and family roles from their childhoods, such as a "favorite" child or a child who exerted control over the others. A common source of conflict among caregiving children is the feeling of one child that he/she is shouldering most of the work and not receiving help from the others. A child who is not local may feel left out of caregiving decisions and tasks. As with finances, if one or both parents have second marriages, caregiving may be complicated by the differing opinions and goals of each parent's children from a previous relationship.

Time: Absent a crisis, when caregiving tasks begin, the initial commitment of time is often minimal. As a loved one ages, this time commitment often increases, leading to potential conflicts between spouses or adults feeling as if they are "sandwiched" between the needs of their parents and their own children. Add a career into the mix and balancing all of these responsibilities can be precarious. Heightened levels of stress increase the likelihood that conflict will occur.

The many potential sources of conflict may lead some people to believe that positive outcomes in family caregiving situations are few and far between. Although not all challenges can be eradicated, strategies are available which can help prevent conflict from occurring and maximize a family's caregiving experience. Learn about some of these strategies at Keystone Elder Law's next seminar on Thursday, June 21 at 3:00pm. The seminar will be held in our conference center at 555 Gettysburg Pike, Suite B-300, Mechanicsburg. No registration is required.