

Eldercare Services and Professionals: How to Maneuver Through the Maze

Written by Cheri Burcham, University of Illinois Extension Educator, Family Life

If you are caring for a dependent adult, you may feel such emotions as denial, panic, and fear. With the many responsibilities that you face in your own life, you may find that there is no extra time for caregiving. This task becomes more difficult when there is geographic distance between the caregiver and the care-receiver.

There is a network of senior services in most communities, but there is no one number to call to reach them. Tracking down resources and putting them into place can be very exhausting and frustrating for caregivers.

Steps in Selecting Community Resources

- Conduct an informal needs assessment. Get input from friends, family, and the care-receiver about the barriers to independence that exist and the formal and informal supports that are used or could be used.
- Locate resources by contacting agencies.
- Use a separate sheet of paper to record each agency's name, number, address, and the name and title of person spoken to for each contact made.
- Prepare a common list of questions and record the answers.
- When scheduling appointments, find out all documents that will be needed and prepare them ahead of time.
- Have one advocate or family representative assigned to handle each area of assistance needed. This helps avoid confusion.
- Keep all contact information current.
- Inform everyone who is involved with caring.

Important Factors to Consider

- The circumstances and wishes of the care-receiver and your family. Be realistic about what care-receivers and family members can do.
- The layout of the care-receiver's home and the proximity to needed services.
- The care-receiver's independence and autonomy. It is important that he feels empowered and a part of the decision making.
- The financial and legal aspects, which vary from state to state. Be familiar with the care-receiver's legal and financial status before setting up services.
- Informal support systems. Do not underestimate the network of friends and church family.