

## Caring from a Distance

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Caring for someone long-distance can be as stressful, or sometimes even more stressful, than being in the same location. Although your initial reaction may be to move your family member closer to you, consider first whether this might be more disruptive and stressful for everyone involved. Are you prepared to have them live with you? Or are you prepared to be their only social contact once they have been moved away from what is familiar to them?

Below are some suggestions for making caring from a distance easier:

- First of all remember, you may not be able to do everything, but you will be able to do enough. Even the “best” caregivers feel a sense of guilt believing that they could have done more
- Establish a support network in your family member’s hometown with contact people who can provide you with a clear picture of the situation. These contact people might include a close friend, a minister, a doctor or others who regularly visit them. Ask them to alert you if they notice changes in your family member’s behavior, appearance, memory, mobility or food habits.
- Ask someone to check in with your family member on a regular basis. Keep the name and telephone number of this person with you at all times and ensure that they have your telephone numbers.
- You may need to set up a financial arrangement with a neighbour or student to run errands or perform various chores to help your relative to better manage his or her life.
- Gather information about services, resources and other avenues for care available in their community. Call the local senior’s center for information. Do this in advance even if you don’t need these services immediately.
- Pick up a copy of the local telephone directory and take it back home with you.
- Schedule regular visits. Plan in advance what you need to accomplish during the visit in addition to visiting with your relative. Be observant while you are there. Are they eating regularly? Are the bills getting paid?
- Some communities offer telephone assurance programs. Usually staffed by volunteers, these programs place calls to frail and disabled persons living alone. If the person who is called does not answer at the designated check-in time, the volunteer then places a call to an emergency number provided by the family. Many volunteer organizations also have friendly visitor programs that provide regular visits to elders who aren’t able to get out.
- In a non-emergency situation, try to step back and evaluate whether or not you need to travel or if you can send someone else in your place. Can someone take care of it locally? This frees up your time and funds for emergency situations or times when it is essential for you to be there.
- Make sure legal and financial affairs are in place and up-to-date. Find out who their lawyer is, where their bank is located and where they keep their important documents.

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