

K-State Research and Extension News for November, 2021

When It's Your Turn to Ask for Help

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Caregiving is a tough job. This November, during National Family Caregiver's Month, we embrace the people who lovingly give baths, clean houses, shop for, and comfort aging and ill loved ones. More than 53 million Americans are currently serving in the role of a family caregiver. Many times, they find themselves in this role with little or no warning.

In the world of caregiving, you hear the word "support" often. Seeking out relationships that provide the emotional support needed to get through difficult times is very much needed. What support doesn't do, however, is change the circumstances under which you are living. It does not minimize the job at hand.

Providing help is something that caregivers know a lot about. The question is how often does someone lend you a helping hand? According to the Caregiver Action Network, 65% of caregivers do not get consistent help from other family members. If you also consider the fact that 61% of family caregivers also remain in the workforce, the struggles of balancing work with the ever-increasing demands at home can at times be overwhelming.

But how do you get the help you need and where do you find it? Just as you have to reach out to get support and be open to receiving it, you also need to reach out and ask for help – and know how to accept it when it is offered. This isn't always easy.

The first step in getting help is recognizing that caregiving is far too big a task to tackle alone. Sometimes that can be hard to admit. Caregivers feel guilty even thinking they can't juggle everything themselves, or they believe no one else can do their job as well as they can. Caregiving is an emotional experience and the best way you can determine the help you need is to create a list of all the things that need to get done. This process can remove some of the emotion involved and can help you gain perspective and realize you really do have a lot on your plate and asking for help is not a bad thing.

Items on your task list may include cooking meals, mowing the lawn, filling out insurance forms, driving your loved one to the doctor, doing laundry or helping bathe and dress your loved one. Once you have your list of tasks, group them into categories (personal care, household chores, etc.). Putting things down on paper and organizing them into groups can help create order out of the chaos that may surround you. It serves another purpose as well. It gives you a tool to use in reaching out to others to ask for help.

Review your list and highlight the items that you are not comfortable asking anyone to help with, such as helping your loved one get dressed. You now have a clear picture of where you can use some help. Pat yourself on the back for a job well done!

Asking for help with a list in hand is very different than complaining about your situation. Being prepared when asking for help shows that you are resourceful and trying to deal with a difficult situation. You are more likely to find people who are willing to help, or know someone who is.

Think outside the box when deciding who to share the list with. Can a neighbor help mow the lawn vs. a family member or friend? Does your church have a women's group who likes to prepare meals? Having a list may also help recruit family members that previously said they were unable to help. Breaking the process of caregiving down into tasks may give your family the opportunity to help with care where they did not see an opportunity before. Saying "can you help take care of mom" seems like an overwhelming task vs. "can you cook dinner for mom on Tuesday".

If you are caring for a loved one, start making your list today. Give yourself permission to ask for help. If you are not caring for a loved one, but know someone who is, reach out and offer your assistance. Encourage the caregiver to create a list. Brainstorm who might be available to help with some of the tasks and choose a task that you can complete. If you are not able to help with a task, send a card or note of encouragement to brighten their day. The work of caregiving stretches across 365 days a year. Any extra love, hope and compassion is welcome, and appreciated.

Source: Caregiver Action Network.