

CAREGIVING: IDENTIFYING NEED

Caregivers come from all walks of life. Whether you are a paid professional, trained volunteer or a valued friend or family member, you may someday be charged with the care of another individual. Caring for another person is not an easy task and may be doubly harder when caregiving is a part of other responsibilities.

Caregiving involves meeting one or more of the four major needs one might have in his life; physical, emotional, social and financial. The role a caregiver may play in someone's life may be dramatically different depending on which need or needs must be addressed. Physical needs may involve things such as nutrition, bathing, shopping and the ability to move around the home or other living space. Emotional needs may include a sense of self-worth or being loved. A care recipient with a debilitating illness may be grieving over losing independence. An effective caregiver will address the grief issues and find ways to enhance independence. Social interaction is very important for individual well-being. The caregiver may be the only regular contact that a care recipient has. Financial needs impact many other areas including health, housing and feelings of security. The caregiver's primary responsibility is to make sure that all bases are covered – that the care recipient is not a danger to himself or others.

Ideally, a person needing assistance with personal care would ask for help. However, this is not always the case. The question then becomes how to tell if someone needs help or even how do I know if I need help. One of the main concerns should be overall functioning and well-being. Ask yourself if this person functions well enough to continue to live unassisted. If you are unsure, think about other things that may affect function and independence such as taking medications on a regular basis. Functional impairment is judged based on ability to perform activities of daily living, such as bathing and toileting; and, to an extent activities, such as grocery shopping or cleaning house. Caregivers often find that there are many things to be considered when evaluating the capabilities of another person.

Another indicator may be appearance and hygiene - some things to consider;

- Have teeth been brushed?
- Does the person appear clean?
- Are clothes clean?
- Is clothing appropriate?

Answers to these questions give clues not only about personal care abilities but also interest in self-care. Lack of interest in self-care may be an indicator of depression, which can affect decision-making and could lead to a health crisis.

Finance issues are very much a part of evaluating need for additional care. You must consider whether or not an individual has the ability to make sound financial decisions as well as whether or not he is able to pay bills when they are due. You and your care recipient must also decide if he can afford to live on his current income as well as meet future needs. This will help determine whether the level of care needed to remain at home may be afforded.

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