

The Area Agency on Aging & Disabilities of Southwest Washington's Caregiver Corner

Balancing Caregiving and Personal Relationships

Caregiving isn't just about you and your older loved one; it can also affect other people in your life. If you're dedicating significant time to your caregiving responsibilities, it's likely that you have to balance this role with your time together with your romantic partner, children, friends or other loved ones.

When this happens, it can feel like you're being made to "choose between" your older loved one and the other people you care about. When either choice means losing or growing distant from someone you love, it can feel unreasonable and unfair. Studies show that caregivers already have higher rates of stress, depression, and social isolation than noncaregivers. Strained relationships caused by caregiving often increase feelings of loneliness and stress.

If you feel caregiving is hurting your personal relationships, consider these tips:

1. Communicate openly

If you notice difficulties in your relationships resulting from the time you spend caregiving, open up communication as soon as possible. Keeping it unspoken will only cause resentment and misunderstandings to build. Difficult conversations can often turn tense and accusatory, so pay attention to how you frame your comments. Instead of using "you" language—such as "Why are *you* so upset?" or "*You're* making this hard for me"—try using "I" language—"I want to feel more supported" or "*I* feel spread thin." When working for solutions together, you can then move into "we" language, since relationships are a team effort. "*We* should look for ways to spend more time together" and "*We* need to make a plan for this as a team."

It's important to speak openly when making decisions about your loved one, too, especially when the decisions affect other people. For example, you should talk to your partner before making decisions about your loved one's living situation, and make sure they're on board before taking action.

2. Ask for help

Taking on everything by yourself can leave you with little time for anything else. Even if you feel obligated to do so as your loved one's caregiver, taking on too many responsibilities is neither healthy nor realistic. Write down your current schedule. If you have barely any time for other people between work and caregiving, it's time to consider a change.

It's not a sign of weakness to reach out to family, friends and others in the community for support when you need it. There are also many different types of community services available to help older adults and caregivers—meal delivery services, adult day programs, senior centers, home care, care coordination, transportation services and financial assistance, just to name a few.

If you don't know where to start your search for support, the Administration for Community Living's [Eldercare Locator](#) can help you find what resources are available in your area.

3. Include yourself as a priority

Your wellness may not seem like it has anything to do with your relationships. But if you're tired, stressed, depressed, moody or overwhelmed, that tends to affect the people around you whether you mean it to or not.

Consider what would make you happier and healthier—such as more sleep, more time to dedicate to hobbies, three balanced meals a day—and make realistic goals to improve your wellness. If you're in a better place physically, mentally and emotionally, you'll be in better condition to positively interact with the people you love.

4. Look into counseling

If you're still struggling with relationships, it may help to reach out to professional counseling services. Counseling can help you address the multiple layers of your situation, from your caregiving responsibilities to how they may be affecting your work and personal lives.

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Contact the Area Agency on Aging and Disabilities of Southwest Washington at 360-694-8144 or ClarkADRC@dshs.wa.gov to learn more about supports available to family caregivers. Article content is provided by Active Daily Living.