

## TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES IN CAREGIVING

Many adults find themselves faced with responsibilities of caring for aging relatives. It is helpful for them to know that they are not alone. According to an AARP survey of family caregivers (1997), eight out of ten caregivers reported helping with transportation. Situations with traveling and transportation challenges frequently arise. The difficulties that arise in the area of transportation include handling a wheelchair or other assistive device, agitation, distracting behaviors, and non-compliance. These difficulties may cause some family caregivers to stop transporting their loved ones, or only take them for the most essential appointments. This can lead to frustration and eventually isolation for both family caregivers and their loved ones.

### **Multiple strategies**

Most caregivers must try multiple strategies. It's not uncommon to find that what works today may not work tomorrow. Know that trial-and-error is part of the method. Remember, too, that there is almost always a solution and a way to make every trip easier.

The following are tips that can help to solve some of the transportation issues that caregivers face.

1. Be patient and calm. Remain aware of your body language.
2. Allow yourself and your loved one plenty of time. The slower you go, the faster things get done.
3. Keep directions simple by explaining them one step at a time and by demonstrating what it is you'd like him/her to do. Give information in small amounts. Repeat yourself using a calm tone of voice as necessary.
4. Be prepared with relaxing music, sunglasses, photos, or food in case they are needed during the ride. Encourage reminiscence.
5. Use proper body mechanics. Take advantage of adaptive equipment that can make transfers and mobility much easier for your loved one.
6. Suggest that your loved one use the bathroom before each trip.
7. Plan ahead if you are going to a new place with your loved one by calling before you leave to find out what entrance to use.
8. If your loved one becomes agitated or resistive, agree and act as if you are going along with his/her plan while you proceed with your original plan and destination. Take cues from your loved one's behaviors. Try to see things from his/her perspective.
9. Seat your loved one in the rear passenger seat so that the steering wheel is out of reach and he/she is not directly behind you, enabling you to make eye contact with him/her periodically while driving. Use the seat belt and make sure the child lock is in the "on" position. Have a cellular phone in the car, in case you need help.

10. Think about joining a support group for caregivers to gain new ideas and to be with others in similar circumstances. This can help to energize you and help you to do a better job of caregiving.

### **Communication**

Communication includes both the verbal and non-verbal exchanges between the family caregiver and their loved one. Caregiver frustration and worries can have a negative impact on understanding, patience, and tolerance. Family caregivers are in the best place to set the tone for what these interactions will be like. When traveling, as with any interaction with their loved one, it's important for family caregivers to stay calm and be patient. This is a key for success.

Compared to communication between acquaintances, communication between family members can more easily become emotional. Family caregivers often react to the present moment based in the context that they have had over the years with their family members. In order to be the most helpful during times of transportation, family caregivers should stay focused on the present. They should use self-talk to remind themselves to "go slow," "pace themselves" and "take one step at a time."

### **Preventing Agitation**

It is important for family caregivers to empathize with their loved one. Empathy with their loved one facilitates good communication. For family caregivers this means putting themselves in their loved one's place, thinking about how she/he might experience things. Offering verbal support during these particular instances can help ease her/his fears and minimize her/his discomfort. Caregivers should avoid arguing with their loved one, and remember to stay calm.

The environment of the vehicle itself (car, van, etc.) can be a source of agitation. A practical tip is for family caregivers to assess the temperature beforehand and try to keep it comfortable, to the extent possible. It is also important to keep the vehicle clutter-free, and reduce glare on bright sunny days.

Caregivers should plan ahead and have needed supplies available. Relaxing music can be helpful, both for the family caregiver and their loved one. Sunglasses reduce glare. Photos or food may be used as distracters during the ride.

Source: Adapted from the Easter Seals program, Transportation Solutions for Caregivers: A Starting Point. 2002. This free program is available from the Easter Seals national headquarters for a nominal shipping/handling fee. For more information contact the Easter Seals national headquarters at 312-726-6200 (ask for Administrative Services). This program is also available locally for loan from the Caregiver Resource Network library. Call (616) 234-3483 for more information.

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This fact sheet is provided as a public service of the Caregiver Resource Network. The **Caregiver Resource Network** is a collaboration of Kent County organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at [www.CaregiverResource.net](http://www.CaregiverResource.net) or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.