

Why and When a Family Caregiver Should Call a Professional for Help

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Older Americans currently comprise over 13 percent of our nation's total population, representing the fastest growing segment of our country. Over 77,000 older adults currently reside in Kent County. They have and continue to play a critical political, cultural, and social role in every phase of our community's life. These older men and women have advanced our nation and local community by their sacrifices and ongoing contributions within the workforce and through volunteerism. For just this reason, May has been established as "Older Americans Month" by the U.S. Administration on Aging in an effort to encourage Americans to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of older persons, with this year's theme being "Celebrate Long-Term Living."

During Older American's Month the Caregiver Resource Network wishes to recognize and support the efforts of the over 44 million family caregivers in the U.S. Family caregivers represent nearly 1 in 4 households nationally, and 1 in 3 households in Kent County. Family caregivers often lack appropriate information on why and when to contact a professional for assistance in their caregiving role. Therefore, here are our top ten tips on why and when a family caregiver should call a professional for help:

Why to seek professional help

1. Most elderly who receive care do not use formal services. Less than 10% of caregivers use paid services, and although they could benefit from added support services use formal services only as the last resort.
2. When family caregivers do approach formal service providers, they tend to be very selective and modest in their service requests, often requesting far less than professionals would have recommended. Therefore, limiting the potential benefit of available support services.
3. Family caregivers are often unrealistic regarding what they can do on their own, and feel guilty about asking others for or accepting outside help.
4. Daughters are less likely to seek formal services for their parents than sons due to internalized expectations, and therefore often experience conflict arising from their attempts to balance the demands of the caregiver role and the demands of other family and social roles.
5. Physically demanding caregiving activities (assisting in toileting, bathing, and transfer) can result in physical injury at a time when the caregiver is experiencing physical limitations themselves. Without outside support family caregivers often become exhausted and physically drained with little or no time for adequate rest, exercising, or eating balanced meals.
6. Elderly spouses strained by caring for an ailing husband or wife are 63% more likely to die than other spouses according to the Journal of the American Medical Association.
7. Family caregiving is emotionally stressful with about 1/3 of all adult children showing signs of clinical depression after just 1 year of caregiving. This is

especially true for families who feel the need to do it all on their own without outside help.

When to seek professional help

8. Seek professional help early and often. Unfortunately most family caregivers wait until they are in crisis to call for help. This is often too late for them to benefit from the wide range of services available, and may limit their choices.
9. It is especially important to seek professional help when it is in the best interest of either the caregiver or care recipient for the sake of his/her safety or mental and physical well-being.
10. Education is the key. Family caregivers who take the time to become educated consumers are more likely to know how to seek the right professional help when appropriate.

You've probably heard the saying "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Praying that a crisis won't happen, but planning for it in case it does, is sound advice for all families. One way for families to do this is by becoming familiar with the wide-range of community-based services available to help support them in their caregiving role. These services may include, but are not limited to, homemaker, home chore, home delivered meals, care management, home health aide, home-based nursing and therapy services, friendly visitor, telephone reassurance, personal emergency response systems, in-home respite care, home repair and maintenance, transportation, loan/use of assistive devices, and hospice care. For more information on caregiver resources consult the Caregiver Resource Network website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.

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 or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.