

7 Steps for Carers to Consider When Navigating The Care Maze

To help you navigate this tricky life stage, we share seven bite-sized practical steps to consider when preparing to care.



Whether you know your family is entering the realms of caring for elderly relatives, already in the thick of it, or can see the phase just looming on the horizon, the issues that were discussed are sure to help you navigate this tricky life stage.

Check out their advice on seven practical steps to take when preparing to care...

1. Face the Near Future Together

- Prepare ahead for the difficult conversations, think about the language you use, and enabling your elderly relative to still feel they have a say and control over their decision-making
- Ensure **family** members are on board - this can be difficult, but as much as possible, agree on a common purpose and goals for the best welfare of your relative
- Do your **research** - it will help you to be reassuring and knowledgeable
- Choose your moment; it has to be right for your relative, not on the doorstep when saying goodbye or when surrounded by grandchildren!
- Give them time to prepare their thoughts, don't rush them, and expect delaying tactics
- Gain their acceptance that they need support
- **Reassure** them about their future - it is a scary time and most people dread this life stage, so try to have empathy for their situation
- Be honest with yourself about what will work for them

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2. Understand Costs, Procedures & Legalities

- Ensure that you put in place Lasting **Power of Attorney** (LPA) for health and welfare as well as property and financial affairs and register it before you are concerned about any mental incapacity
- Ensure there is an up-to-date **will** in place
- Find and consult with a specialist financial adviser - with a **Society of Later Life Adviser Qualification** that's registered with the IFA - this will be invaluable when trying to calculate costs and budgets for care
- Explore costs & arrangements for different types of care
- Connect with their **GP and other medical specialists** as necessary to ensure you are aware of what needs your loved one currently has - and importantly - may have further down the line
- Keep and share vital **contacts** and information
- If necessary take **legal advice** from a recommended law firm

3. Explore & Evaluate Options

There are many different types of care and it's important to understand what each one is and the costs involved. You can get expert help with this or research the following:

- Retirement Villages
- Assisted Living
- Home Care
- Live-in Care
- Respite Care
- Residential Care (with/without Nursing care provision)
- Dementia Care

4. Anticipate Longer-Term Care Needs

It's important to evaluate their current physical and mental well-being as well as seek advice from their medical professionals on how any conditions are likely to progress as you will need to pick a care choice that can accommodate any deterioration.

- Do they have any established **health conditions**?
- What **treatment or medication** is needed now and what is likely to be required on an ongoing basis?
- Is there any **family history** of degenerative conditions?
- How do they typically react to illness or pain?

These questions will help you evaluate which care solution will be best for the longer term or establish that you may need a combination to cover the shorter term, then the long term.

5. Avoid a Crisis

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Getting older and needing care is often a scary and daunting process with the feeling of loss of control a major anxiety-inducing factor. Planning ahead means that crises can often be avoided - and where unavoidable - at least you have contingencies that reduce any last-minute distress or panic.

- Develop a plan - be **proactive** rather than reactive. It's hard but try to anticipate the unforeseen!
- How can you keep them **safe** in the short term?
- Consider **personal alarms** to raise the alert in case of an accident when alone in their home
- Prepare for access **in emergencies** - who has keys, what's the best way to let medics in?
- Consider outdoor and **nighttime safety** such as motion-sensor lights and indoor safety - locks and home alarms

6. Look, Listen & Learn

- Try to develop a heightened sense of **awareness** - pick up on little details and read between the lines of what your relative is saying. Take a look around their environment to see if what they're saying holds true - are they really coping or actually struggling?
- Explore without pre-judging; be **open-minded** about options
- Show you're willing to **listen** and put yourself in their shoes to understand what they want ...but recognise it has to work for all of you
- Be resourceful, persistent, but also realistic and accept there will be uncertainty and limitations
- Keep talking - there's a lot of information out there but it can be confusing - **talking to experts** and widening your network helps. Also keep talking to your relative as their needs and thoughts may well change along their journey

7. Back to You

You won't be much use supporting your loved one if you've run yourself ragged, so it's important you look after yourself and create a network to help you navigate this period - as it can last for several years.

- Establish a **support network** and communicate with them. Ask for help when you need it, whether that's professional or personal
- Know - and play to - your **strengths**, be clear on what you can do, and accept your limitations
- Try to keep the practical and emotional separate
- Accept that this is an uncertain time and things won't always go to plan
- And finally, eat well, take moderate exercise, sleep regularly, and take time for yourself - without feeling guilty. Don't be hard on yourself!