



## Siblings in Caregiving

Family dynamics between siblings can be complicated under the best of circumstances. Add being caregivers to parents to the mix and the potential for difficulties rises.

In my own caregiving role to my parents, I experienced the challenges and stresses that are often typical in many families. I remember feeling alone in decisions, despite there being 3 siblings in the family. Since I worked in the field of elder services, it seemed natural that I would be the lead person in control of certain issues. I was the only one living away from our parents and the distance was a hindrance but I travelled the 600 miles frequently. I was often angry and resentful about what felt like an unequal division of caregiving duties.

When I began to view each of my siblings as individuals with unique personalities, needs and their own set of problems, the stress lessened for me. It was unfair to expect that each would think and act the same as me. Instead, I started to appreciate what each of us could do instead of what someone was not doing. The goal became to provide the best care to our parents, regardless of our roles in the family. I found it more efficient to consider who was most able, willing, skilled, and emotionally prepared for the role and if the answer was me most times, I appreciated that I had the stamina to perform. I also was thankful for whatever a sibling could contribute. Everyone had their strength and with a common goal, things came together eventually and made for a smoother transition.



### Caregiver Resources:

Our Family Caregiver Specialists have identified concerns & questions that are commonly discussed in support groups and counseling sessions. Check our blog at [www.nselder.org](http://www.nselder.org) for our monthly Caregiver topic. We'll provide you with some resources & options for handling specific issues.

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Sibling tensions can surface during this major transition of our parents aging and facing mortality. We tend to slip into our old roles from growing up and those roles probably do not work any longer. Some adult children may have trouble accepting the parent needs help and remain in denial. There may be differences in opinion of what help parents need.

North Shore Elder Services' **Kathy Perrella, Options Program Manager**, shares her experience working with a family. "Recently, I worked with two sisters and a brother who were caring for their 85 year old mother who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. The elder was very suspicious and sabotaged most plans that the family made for getting additional services into the home, which in many families can set up insurmountable pitfalls. The family established a goal to keep their mother at home for as long as she was safe and content."

"I believe that this family was successful because they established a common goal and were able to split up tasks and hire services where there were gaps. They also educated themselves about the disease and learned how to use therapeutic "fibrils". (An Alzheimer's Association technique that suggests creating a calm environment should be the goal, not telling the truth). The siblings made every effort to communicate with each other so that everyone knew what was happening. They texted each other after each visit with their mother and would alert the next sibling visitor of "issues" or needed items. This helped identify problems and keep everyone on the same page. These siblings did not always agree with each other on how to achieve the goal but the good news was that they continued to listen to each other and were willing to compromise. Good communication is the key to success."

When siblings are unable to work together, it may be time to consult with a third party. There are Geriatric Care Managers who can be hired to help manage the care of an elder and work with the family. Check this website for locating your area's availability <https://www.agingcare.com/local/geriatric-care-managers>. North Shore Elder Services will be offering private paid case management in the very near future so stay tuned for more information on this exciting program!

When family relationships seem beyond repair, it is recommended that an elder care mediator be hired. This person will mediate family disputes. When issues like inheritance disagreements, etc. are part of the dynamics, it is worth trying a mediator before going to court. Check the following link <http://www.mediate.com/mediator/results.cfm>

There are several resources to consult when discussing the issue of caregiving with siblings. The Family Caregiver Alliance has a concise list entitled "Tips for winning more support from your siblings" and can be found at <https://www.caregiver.org/print/22232>

If you are wanting some organization aids that will assist families with scheduling issues, check out the following; <http://lotsahelpinghands.com>, <https://carezone.com>, and [www.mint.com](http://www.mint.com)

Remember that the family dynamics of today were present before having to become caregivers to your parents. You may not be able to resolve existing conflicts. It can be a very emotional and difficult time working with your siblings. However, taking steps towards good communication and support of one another can actually bring siblings closer together.

*-Jayne Girodat, NSES*

*To read the blog in its entirety, go to [www.nselder.org](http://www.nselder.org)*