

How to Start Helping

Once you determine that it is time to begin helping, how do you do it? What is the best way to begin helping your elderly relative or friend?

The first thing to remember is that there is no one, "right" way to start helping. Helping the elderly is like helping anyone else; much of what you do will have to be based on the specific person and their situation. Helping means different things to different people; what one person considers help another will consider intrusion.

Here are a few tips for you as you begin to help:

ASK!

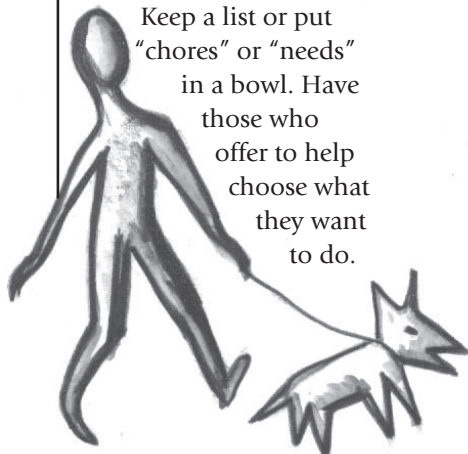
If you are wondering how you can help, perhaps the best thing to do first is to ask. "What do you need? What can I do to help? What is hard for you to do? What have you been wanting someone to do?" You will find that by asking (and listening to the answer), you'll learn what the person really needs.



START SMALL

Helping someone can be as simple as calling them once a week to make sure they're okay. You might buy groceries for them, walk their dog, pull the weeds in their flowerbed. If you start with small things, you'll open up channels of communication, so when they really need something, or something happens, you will be the first one they call.

Keep a list or put "chores" or "needs" in a bowl. Have those who offer to help choose what they want to do.

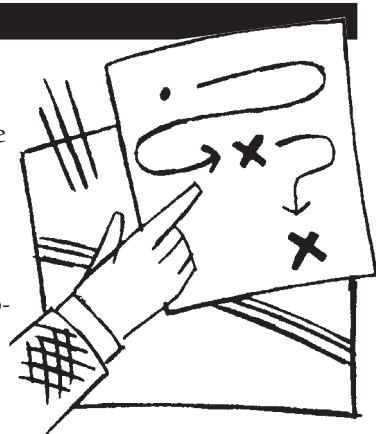


FORGIVE

Often with family members—especially aging parents—there are many unresolved issues, frustrations, resentment and anger. These emotions get in the way of true helpfulness and care. Try to let go of negativity, and embrace a new life with your elders. They need you now, and the best—and most difficult—thing you can do is forgive them for real or imagined harm they have done you. Leave the past behind and try to rise above your differences and grievances. Or, share your feelings and move on. Listen to their feelings and try to understand their perspective and concerns.

AVOID CONTROLLING

Remember, you are there to help—not to take over. Unless you have been granted power of attorney or you are certain that the elderly person is incompetent, you must respect their dignity and their wishes. In many cases, you can offer suggestions, but it will be up to them to make their own decisions. Try to avoid friction by accommodating their wishes at the same time as you work toward achieving what you believe is best for them. Be loving, supportive and encouraging.



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