



Starting a conversation about getting more help – for caregivers

“I want to do what’s best for my wife, but I don’t know where to start.”

For many of us, it’s unknown territory and we’re not sure how to care for someone who’s losing the ability to look after themselves. We’re suddenly faced with unfamiliar and possibly uncomfortable tasks. It can be scary for us when we realise our mum, dad, husband or wife is no longer the confident, in-control person we’ve always known them to be.

At Public Trust, our customers tell us the most difficult moment is talking to our loved one about the fact that they may need more help.

Your feelings and your loved one’s feelings

It’s not unusual to feel resentment and frustration, and then guilt at these feelings, combined with sadness at what we’ve lost. We may even feel that we ought to be able to cope better.

If you’re feeling this way, you’re not alone! Millions of people are finding their way through a new kind of relationship with their loved one. Rest assured that even though it may feel far from perfect at times, you are making a big difference to helping your loved one live well through their retirement.

Caring for our loved ones as they get older is an emotional journey. Some of us grow up with the expectation that we’ll care for our relatives when they need it, but for many of us, it’s an unexpected new responsibility.

“He’s so stubborn!”

At the same time, our loved one may not welcome our help with gratitude. They are going through their own complex mix of emotions, and may not find it easy to cope with being dependent on us. Caregiving is a role which requires our strength, courage, love, patience and time.

Practical considerations and caring for carers

“Life is so busy. I don’t know how we can give mum and dad all the help they need when they’re so far away.”

Today’s families often don’t live in the same suburb or town. Blended family situations can add complexity to the question of who does what in terms of caring for a loved one. In some families, daughters are expected to do more caregiving than sons, and those of us without families of our own may find we’re expected to shoulder more of the responsibility.

It can be hard to speak up about your needs, to make sure caregiving is a manageable and fair role for you.

Involving your loved ones

Getting older brings with it a complex cocktail of physical and psychological challenges. For example, your loved one may have lost their spouse who always looked after the bills. They're coping with loneliness and stress at the same time as taking on new responsibilities. Or they may struggle with mild forgetfulness whilst needing to remember medicines to manage diabetes or high blood pressure.

The first step in a care plan is understanding what is difficult for your loved one, and how they would prefer to be helped.

Tips for starting the conversation

- Plan what you'd like to say in advance. You can even role play it with someone else to make sure it comes out the way you want it to.
- Plan to have the conversation in a place where your loved one feels safe.
- Break the ice by sharing something you read in the paper about the challenges of aging. Use it to help them talk about their feelings.
- Talk about your own preparation for retirement and long-term care. Ask them what they think is important to have in place.
- Go slowly. Plant a seed and be patient – your loved one may need time to get used to the idea.
- Rather than saying "You can't look after yourself" give real observations, such as "I noticed that you're having difficulty remembering what day it is."
- Ask them how they're feeling about their health and managing day-to-day.
- Don't jump to providing a solution. Let them describe what they're experiencing so you can make a plan together.

Remember, it can be hard to bring up the Tough Questions, but you don't need all the answers.

To find out how Public Trust could help keep your loved one safe and in control, contact us now:

0800 371 471

info@publictrust.co.nz

publictrust.co.nz/personal-assist

Making a family plan

Where to start? It can be bewildering at first to think of the many areas of your loved one's life that they may need support with – either now or in future. You don't need all the answers. Many organisations, including Public Trust, support families like yours – take advantage of the resources they offer.

Here are some questions you may want to consider:

- How long are you able to spend helping your loved one? If you work or have other family members to care for, consider these responsibilities as well.
- Work with your loved one on a list of the tasks they find most difficult. You may have differences of opinion about what's important, for instance, you may notice physical safety risks, while they may care more about appearances. Be patient as you work through what needs done.
- Work out how much time these responsibilities are likely to take. What jobs can be delegated to service providers?
- Decide what's most important to you as your loved one ages. Our customers often tell us they don't want to spend their time on administrative tasks, and wish they could spend more quality time with their loved one.
- How can you involve other family members in sharing the responsibilities? Sometimes we can find it hard to let go of our caregiving duties. It's important to step back and let others do things their way.
- Make sure you take into account your own wellbeing. Looking after your loved one is rewarding but it can also be exhausting.
- Plan some breaks so you don't get worn down. Don't be afraid to use services such as respite care and Public Trust's Personal Assist to cover holidays.
- Don't jump to providing a solution. Let them describe what they're experiencing so you can make a plan together.



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