

Recognizing the Need for Outside help in Caregiving

Caregivers often don't recognize when they are in over their heads, and often get to a breaking point. After a prolonged period of time, caregiving can become too difficult to endure any longer. Short-term the caregiver can handle it. Long-term, help is needed. Outside help at this point is needed.



A typical pattern with an overloaded caregiver may unfold as follows:

- 1 to 18 months--the caregiver is confident, has everything under control and is coping well. Other friends and family are lending support.
- 20 to 36 months--the caregiver is taking medication to sleep and control mood swings. Outside help dwindles away and except for trips to the store or doctor, the caregiver has severed most social contacts. The caregiver feels alone and helpless.
- 38 to 50 months--Besides needing tranquilizers or antidepressants, the caregiver's physical health is beginning to deteriorate. Lack of focus and sheer fatigue cloud judgment and the caregiver is often unable to make rational decisions or ask for help.

It is often at this stage that family or friends intercede and find other solutions for care. This may include respite care, hiring home health aides or putting the disabled in a facility. Without intervention, the caregiver may become a candidate for long term care as well.

It is also important to use outside professional help in a caregiver setting. A financial planner, care funding specialist or a reverse mortgage specialist may find the funds to pay for professional help to keep a loved one at home. A care manager can guide the family and the caregiver through the maze of long-term care issues. The care manager has been there many times the family is experiencing it for the first time.

An elder law attorney can help iron out legal problems. And an elder mediator can help solve disputes between family members. Having competent advice can often make the difference between allowing a loved one to remain in the home or being forced to seek out government welfare assistance.

Due to pride or sheer determination some caregivers allow the situation to go beyond their control. They have gotten to a point where depression and fatigue have clouded their judgment. At some point the caregiver will have to admit that he or she can't handle it alone and a better solution must be found.