



Coming Back Together: Eldercare Challenges

Many employees in our university community provide care for an aging family member or friend. The pandemic has challenged these caregivers in numerous ways. The challenges of eldercare certainly won't disappear as we return to campus, but they will be transformed. Our community places a high value on supporting those who provide care for people in need.

As we return to an evolving workplace, employees who provide eldercare should consider the following:

1. **Clearly communicate your needs to your workgroup** – It's easy to forget that people don't know the challenges you've faced since the start of the pandemic. Communicate with detail just what is involved for you in providing care. This can be especially important to communicate to younger colleagues who may not have a personal experience of elder caregiving. Explain how you meet the needs of your care partner within the demands of your job.
2. **Communicate clearly with your care partner** – The reality is that care partners might not have a good grasp of your daily demands. Be detailed in telling them how your workday has changed. For those who worked remotely, care partners might have become accustomed to calling for help as needed. Consider setting up check-in times that can help you better stay on your work tasks.
3. **Consider developing a needs assessment** – When changes happen, needs may change too. Needs assessments are tools to assess an elder's level of functioning and care needs. Consider all aspects of the elder's situation including their ability to accomplish tasks with or without assistance, proper setups for living space, social services that are indicated, and a listing of the network of professionals and loved ones involved in care. Use this comprehensive needs assessment from the National caregivers Library: http://www.caregiverslibrary.org/Portals/0/checklistsandforms_NeedsAssessmentWorksheet.pdf
4. **Always ask for your care partner's input** – This can be an easy step to skip. It might seem like taking some actions without input can avoid conflict, but it can also setup some unhealthy dynamics in the care relationship. If you anticipate some resistance to a care decision, foster the attitude that disagreement is natural but doesn't lead to avoidance. With some difficult care conversations, the first goal is to introduce a subject, and agreement doesn't come in every exchange.
5. **Maintain your own work/life balance** – Caregiver burnout is a very real thing. It might feel like constant availability is what you need as a caregiver, but it often leads to a kind of overwhelm or resentment of your care partner. Providing care for others starts with care for yourself. Can you call on a friend to visit with your partner? Is it OK to skip one visit this week to do some type of self-care activity? The things you do to get help and fortify yourself are great predictors of your outcomes as a caregiver.



6. **Access community resources** – Everyone should know about the eldercare resources available in the larger community. Whether it's near UT or out-of-state, Area Agencies on Aging are the federal programs in every community tasked with pulling together social services and resources for elders. Find the local agency for your care partner with this eldercare locator:
<https://www.n4a.org/>
7. **Caregiver support groups** – Regardless of whether your elder lives locally or far away, local eldercares support groups are great places to make meaningful connections with other caregivers. Refer to this group list to find support that's right for you:
<https://www.ageofcentraltx.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Caregiver-Support-Groups-March18.pdf>

On-campus eldercare resources are also available. Please consult the Employee Assistance Program's eldercare specialist, Jeff Stellmach, if you need assistance in talking through your eldercare needs.