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Clear choices. Better care.

How Do Siblings Avoid Conflict? A Helpful Guide to Caring for Your Aging Parents.

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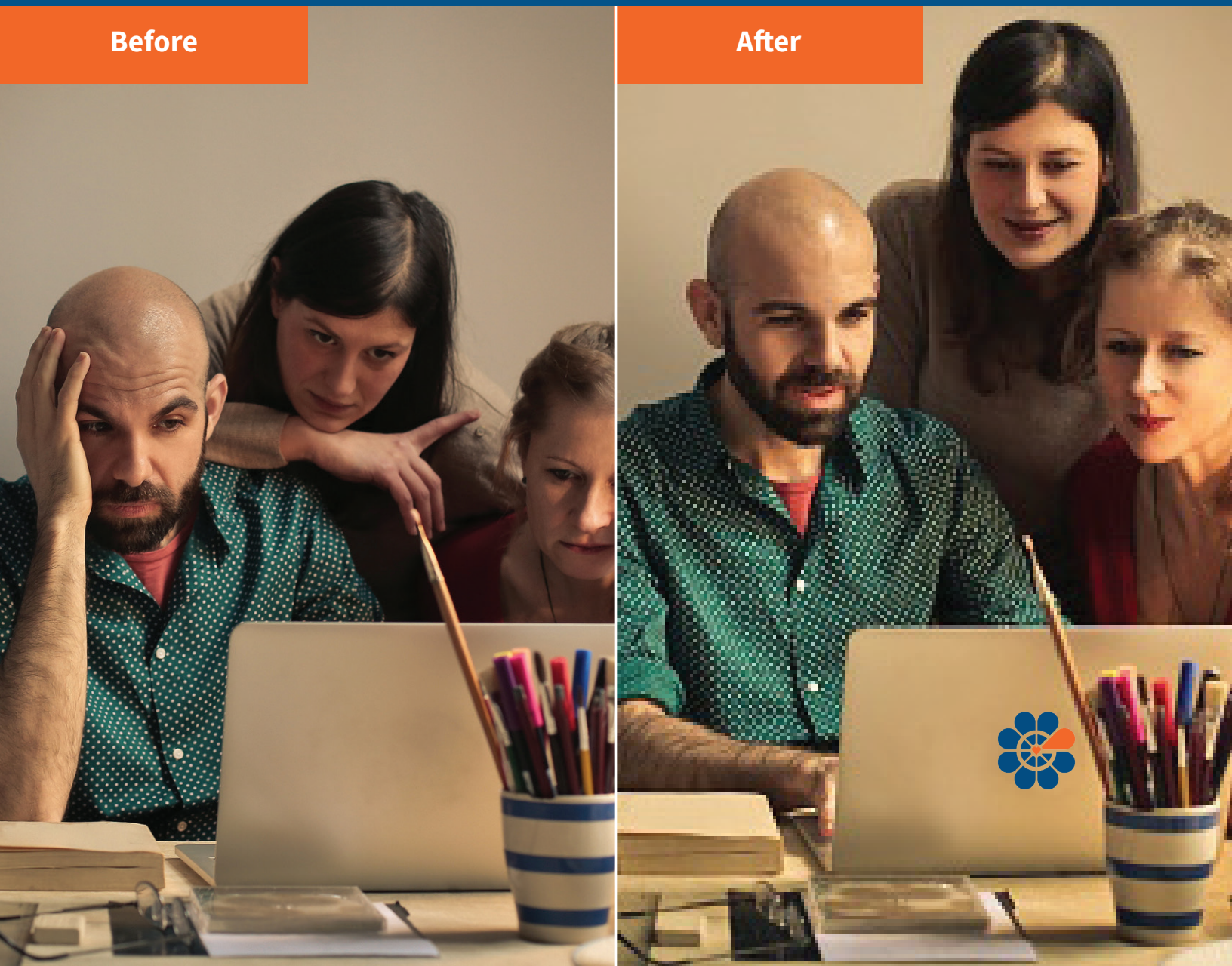

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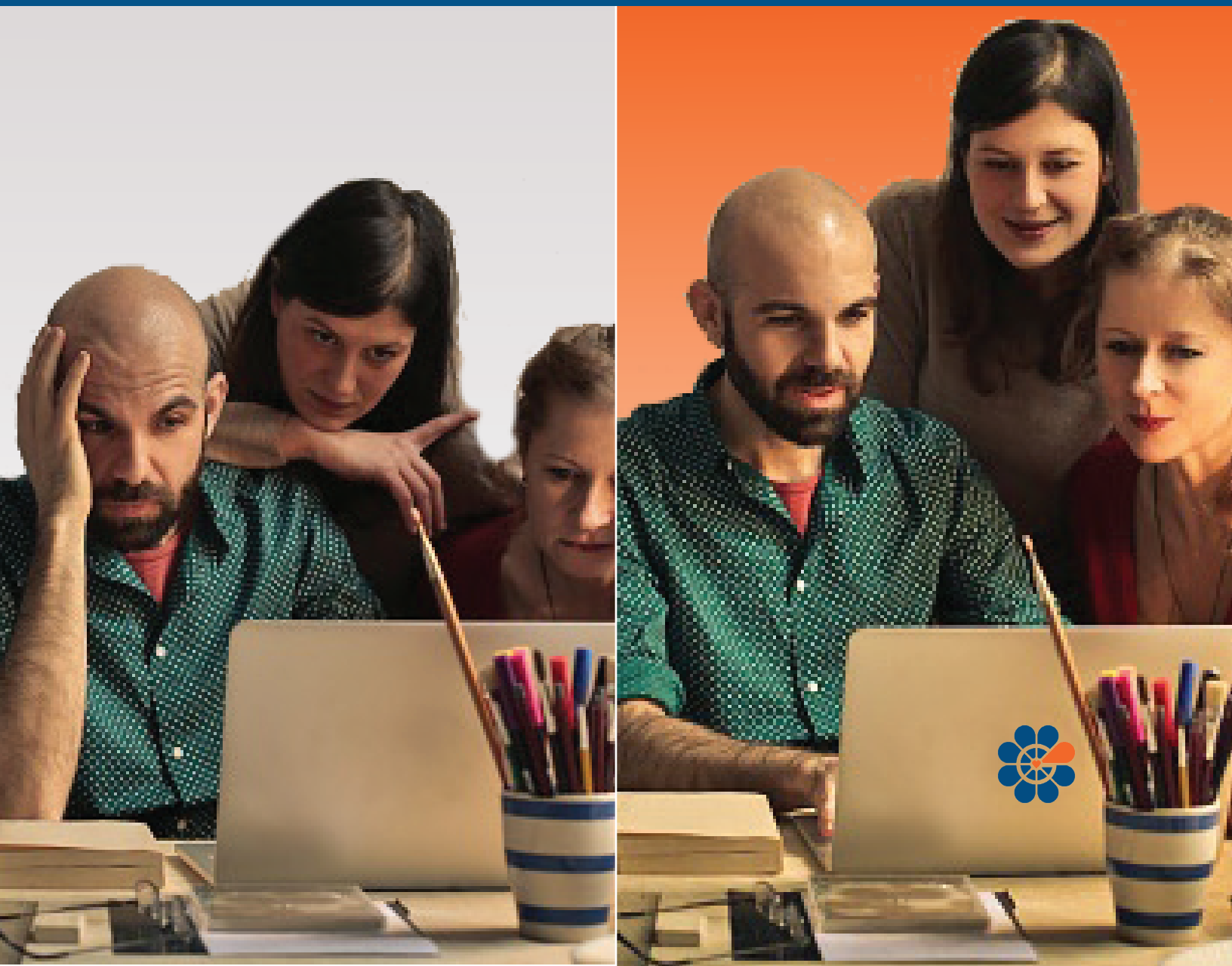

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"Siblings are put on this Earth to live, to entertain, and to annoy each other. It's part of their job requirements."

-BoomSumo

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Introduction

Sibling relationships are often complex. The love runs deep and sometimes, so does the rivalry.

Patterns established in childhood may continue into adulthood and, under the strain of caring for aging parents, they can add fuel to the fire.

During this challenging time, productive conversation and thoughtful planning are the keys to creating a supportive environment that benefits everyone involved.

In this guide, we will address common sibling challenges that emerge and offer some helpful strategies to achieve superior outcomes for your aging loved one.

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Chapter 1:

Rising Tensions Among Siblings Are Common

Caring for parents often puts incredible stress on interactions between adult children.

You and your siblings want what's best for your senior loved one but what that means can vary greatly. Your sister may feel certain that it's time for Dad to move to assisted living and you may feel just as strongly that he should remain in his own home. While there is no one 'right' solution, there are a number of effective strategies that can de-escalate the situation and enable you to focus on addressing the issues at hand. The first step is to recognize that family dynamics, roles stemming from childhood, and many other factors may come into play.

Old habits tend to die hard.

Dealing with the emotionally-charged situation of caring for an elderly or sick parent can cause old tensions to surface, even issues from childhood. You may feel that your headstrong sibling is still trying to take charge or that the less-ambitious one is not pulling their weight, causing resentment and those deep-rooted frictions to resurface. And what about sibling rivalry? It isn't just reserved for children. Even as adults, the desire for parental approval can reign supreme, and for some, it's keenly important to be viewed as the one working hardest on their behalf.

Keep your eye on the prize.

When you are tasked with making critical decisions about the welfare of a beloved senior parent, a host of influences and emotions can create chaos. Despite these detractors, the ultimate goal remains the same: to do what's in the best interest of your loved one and to do it in the most harmonious manner. Is Mom able to stay at home? Will she have to move to assisted living? How much help does she really need? When you're faced with tough questions disagreements are bound to occur, but being open to other perspectives and active listening are among the tools that can reduce the friction. This is the time to apply the strategies you will learn in this guidebook.

Don't allow the past to rule the future.

Conflicts may arise when siblings slip into their traditional roles in the family. For instance, some people naturally gravitate to taking on more responsibility and others tend to evade it. However, these personas may be leftovers from childhood and not necessarily accurate anymore. It's important to view one another with

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respect and look at things objectively, taking a fresh perspective that keeps in mind newfound competencies and experiences that may have been gained over a lifetime. You may be surprised to find that a brother or sister has acquired specific expertise that's desperately needed at this time.

When resentment grows, give it the boot by lending a hand.

Those who are most actively involved in caregiving duties may harbor feelings of bitterness towards other siblings if they believe they are not receiving sufficient help and support. Learning practical new ways to offer help—and to accept it—can be a blessing during times of crises.

Worry creates a host of issues, too.

Stress stemming from concerns over an aging loved one can erupt in many ways. It is often taken out as anger directed at other siblings or relatives. Left unchecked, it can create family rifts and separation, detracting from the unified front that is so important at this time. Simply being aware of these factors can be a helpful first step.

Professional input can ease tensions.

Amid this emotionally-charged landscape, seeking a professional assessment to understand the healthcare needs of the parent greatly reduces the stress and removes the guesswork. With a concrete plan in place for caregiving, the 'blame game' can go by the wayside in favor of constructive discussions designed to help your aging loved one.

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Chapter 2:

Creating a Practical Plan for Caregiving: Seven Keys to Success

At the heart of caring for an aging parent lies the caregiving plan.

This vitally important living resource functions as a guide to keep everyone on task and involved. Because it serves as a guidepost throughout the caregiving journey, it should be regularly updated to reflect the current situation. Here are seven critical factors to consider in forming your caregiving plans.

1. Involve your loved one from the beginning.

Like most things in life, successful outcomes depend largely on open, honest communication. Discussions surrounding the care of elderly loved ones should start with them. Parents are often excluded when siblings talk about next steps in care, which can result in feelings of diminished independence and a lack of autonomy in decision-making. Make sure their voices are heard but be aware that they may be in denial or unrealistic about how much care is needed. It is important to provide honest opinions, accurate assessments, and to make difficult decisions when your loved one is unable to do so. Once the foundation is established, expand the dialogue to include all of your immediate family members.

2. Gain an accurate understanding of what is needed before determining roles.

When creating a care plan, there are many important decisions to be made and potential outcomes to consider. Having a professional clinical assessment performed early in the process saves time and reduces strife by providing expert guidance. Being armed with an accurate understanding of what your loved one needs will help you determine who should be the primary caregiver. This is often based on factors such as proximity to the parent and/or particular skillsets. The plan will also allow you to designate specific roles so that everyone understands their responsibilities and there is no confusion or duplication of efforts.

Our managed care services are performed by our compassionate and experienced team members. We invite you to get to know us. Watch our video bios or give us a call!

"We welcome the opportunity to create a care plan so your loved one can live as independently as possible."

MEET ELLEN

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3. Hold frequent family meetings.

In the workplace, high-performing teams set clear roles and responsibilities, take advantage of diverse skill sets, and insist on good communication. You can also accomplish excellent results within your family by following these principles.

Hold a meeting when it is first determined that care is needed for a parent and include everyone who will be involved in caregiving and decision-making. If you have had a professional clinical assessment completed early in the process, use it to create an outline of topics to be discussed and decisions to be made during the meetings. If it's likely that the meetings will result in arguments or conflict, include a neutral third party for mediation. This could be a professional or a trusted individual outside of the family.

During the family discussions, be sure that everyone has a platform to speak and share their opinions. Set aside any negativity and listen to everyone's input. Setting ground rules and scheduling regular calls can go a long way towards easing tensions and helping everyone feel valued and included.

4. Keep the lines of communication open, especially among siblings.

Caregiving plans address many difficult topics so it is particularly important to maintain channels of communication between you, your loved one, and your family. Finances, caregiving issues, changes in health, mobility limitations, the need to transition to a higher level of care, and a host of other challenging topics will likely need to be broached and these conversations should not be done in a vacuum.

Determine the best way to consistently communicate all relevant information about your loved one to all siblings. This could be through a caregiving app or website, scheduled phone calls, Zoom meetings, or texts throughout the week to make sure everyone is kept up-to-date and on the same page. These care updates will be especially helpful for long distance siblings who may feel removed and possibly guilty about not being physically present to help. It's often not practical to rely on a parent as the main line of communication regarding their health and needs. They may be unable to remember or understand important details, or they may tell each sibling a different thing.

5. Assess potential costs involved and the state of finances.

It's important to have an accurate picture of your loved one's financial situation and the cost of various options that may be required, now and in the future. Frame the conversation in a rational and caring manner. Above all, make sure they know you are there to support them to the best of your ability.

There are many types of professional assistance available, including:

- Home health aides provide at-home or onsite assistance with health services including administering medications, changing bandages, and checking vital signs
- Respite care providers arrange volunteer or paid relief to primary caregivers by temporarily taking over duties. Their services can include health care duties, companionship, or performing household chores.
- Visiting nurses meet patients in their homes and provide care including medications, treatment or other nursing services
- Continuing care retirement communities are live-in communities that provide care to residents, including health services, meals,

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housekeeping, and transportation

- Assisted living facilities are communities for seniors who do not need medical services but require assistance with everyday activities like dressing, meal preparation, and housekeeping
- Nursing homes provide 24-hour nursing services for seniors with extensive medical needs
- Adult daycare centers provide care, companionship, meals, and entertainment to seniors during the day

Where do you fit in?

Once you've established the level of professional care required for your parent, you can determine where you and your siblings fit into the picture. Some of the many ways you may choose to support your loved one include:

- Moving them into your home to reduce living expenses and provide daily care
- Visiting them in their home on a consistent schedule to help with housekeeping, meal preparation, transportation, and provide companionship
- Assisting them with financial matters such as paying bills, working with insurance companies, and other administrative tasks
- Getting prescriptions, sorting weekly medications, and transporting them to doctor appointments

Keep in mind that your parent's needs may change.

The level of care they require is likely to increase over time as they grow older, especially if they have a chronic illness or degenerative condition, so be sure to consider the long term needs.

Evaluate their finances.

Assuming your senior loved one is willing and able to share their financial situation with you, it will help you understand how they can afford care or if additional assistance will be required. There are many factors to consider when it comes to your parent's finances, including:

- Income: How much income they receive on a monthly basis, including Social Security, retirement plans or pensions, government benefits, and any other regular sources of } income.
- Health coverage: If your parent is under 65 and has health insurance, those policies can help them afford their medical costs. Most seniors over 65 are eligible for Medicare. Medicare Part A helps to defray the cost of inpatient care in hospitals, hospices, and some home health care. Medicare Part B helps to cover certain doctor services, outpatient care, medical equipment, and select preventive services. Most patients pay premiums for Medicare Part B. Medigap is supplemental Medicare insurance provided through private insurers to help cover out-of-pocket health expenses. Medicaid helps those with limited income afford medical expenses like doctor visits, hospitalization, and preventive care. Eligibility requirements for Medicaid vary by state.

Finances are a key component in long-term caregiving, affecting where your parent lives, whether paid outside help is available, placement in a facility is a suitable or desirable option, or if home care is manageable with family support.

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6. Learn to offer and accept help.

Caring for an aging parent should be a shared responsibility but it is rarely equally divided. Primary caregivers often feel alone and overburdened and they may be reluctant to ask directly for assistance. When burnout looms, it's time to find a helping hand. If you are part of a family unit caring for an elderly loved one, step up and offer extra assistance whenever you can. Taking Mom to the doctor, picking up prescriptions, or cleaning the house can be a welcome relief for an overtaxed caregiving sibling. If you are in the role of primary caregiver, don't feel that you have to do everything yourself when siblings and family members are willing and able to help. When assistance is offered, take them up on it. Many community resources also exist that can provide respite from caregiving, such as community centers and churches.

7. Don't shy away from seeking professional guidance.

Professionals who have experience dealing with aging parents and their loved ones can be tremendously helpful in navigating the stress of caregiving. They may include geriatric care managers, social workers, physicians, elder law attorneys, and others. The Option Group can guide you to qualified, compassionate professionals who will help you and your family secure superior care for elderly loved ones. We can also provide access to resources in your community that may be available at a discount or even at no cost in some cases.

Our managed care services are performed by our compassionate and experienced team members. We invite you to get to know us. Watch our video bios or give us a call!

"My goal of being a geriatric nurse was inspired by my grandmother when I was young."

MEET STACY

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Chapter 3:
Working Through Your Differences

You and your siblings may have vastly different ideas about the level of care your parent requires and the approach to take.

For many people, it can be hard to accept that the one who has always cared for them is now dependent on others. Some adult children must work through stages of denial while others might feel reluctant to get involved. If you are the primary caregiver, you are likely well aware of your loved one's decline but your siblings may require some time for the realization to sink in. It can be helpful for the doubters to take over caregiving duties for a weekend to gain a first-hand perspective. Here are some additional pointers to keep in mind as you and your siblings work through your differences and execute your caregiving plans.

Be willing to compromise.

When caring for your loved one, it's important that everyone involved strive to maintain the proper perspective. It's easy to get caught up in winning an argument, but the end goal should always be about determining how to provide the best possible care for your parent. As long as the health or safety of your loved one is not being jeopardized, be open to suggestions and trying new solutions.

Let your siblings know their help is needed.

Caregiving is physically, mentally, and often financially exhausting. If you are a primary caregiver, don't be afraid to ask for help. Be direct and specific about what kind of assistance you are seeking. You may find it more beneficial to ask for help with tasks that are appropriate to each sibling. For example, your sister with more free time might be available to take your loved one to an upcoming appointment, while a long-distance brother may be able to assist with finances or by providing virtual companionship for your parent. And while it can be hard to accept, you may find that not all siblings are able or willing to help with caregiving duties. If they don't want to be in that role, don't force the issue. You will likely find that the process is less stressful without their involvement.

Practice self-awareness when requesting help.

Consider your tone of voice and word choice when asking your siblings for assistance. Could it appear that you are trying to make them feel guilty? Do you come across as hostile or accusatory? People are naturally less inclined to want to help if they are feeling attacked. Their reaction will likely be one of defensiveness, anger, or resentment. Check your emotions and do your level best to find a workable path forward with your brothers and sisters.

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Chapter 4:
Easing the Stress of Estate Planning

Dealing with an aging loved one's personal, legal, and financial affairs is never easy.

Yet, however difficult it may be, having this discussion with your parent regarding their wishes will allow you and your family to plan effectively for the future. It also enables your loved one to express their preferences if the time should come that they are unable to speak for themselves.

Get to know the legal documents at your disposal.

There are a number of tools that can be used to allow another individual to act on your parent's behalf. These documents include a Durable Power of Attorney, an Advance Care Directive, and others.

- **The Durable Power of Attorney** allows the specified individual (Agent) to handle a wide range of transactions, including legal, financial, or medical matters. Its purpose is to plan for medical emergencies, cognitive decline later in life, or other situations of incapacitation. This designation can create tension and resentment among adult children. If possible, it should be discussed at a family meeting and clarified for everyone concerned.
- **An Advance Health Care Directive** outlines the types of end-of-life care your loved one desires. By having these preferences in writing, challenging situations are made a little more tolerable.

Preparing these documents in advance helps prevent stress and additional difficult decisions in an emergency or at the end of life. It is wise to consult with an attorney regarding what documents are most appropriate for your particular situation.

Settle any debates regarding wills or inheritances.

These issues are often sources of contention among siblings but they are ultimately the decision of the parent. Any arguments about them create additional stress for your loved one, which is the opposite of what you and your siblings are trying to accomplish. If an inheritance is in question, or if someone feels they should get a larger portion because of their caregiving duties or other reasons, it may become another source of potential conflict. Keep in mind that your parent's will is theirs to direct as they like, and it is not necessarily representative of who is the "good" son or daughter or who does the most for them.

When all else fails, consider mediation. Disputes about inheritances can be ideal cases for family mediators. Their job is to analyze these situations fairly and objectively and to help siblings find areas of common ground.

Place key documents in one secure, accessible location.

Important information such as powers of attorney, Advance Care Directives, wills, deeds, insurance and banking information, and investment details should be kept in a safe place and shared with the appropriate professionals and family members.

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Chapter 5:
Additional Supportive Resources

When you're caring for an aging loved one, additional support is often needed.

Below are some helpful resources that can assist you and your siblings as you develop and execute your caregiving plans.

The Option Group

Our compassionate team of Geriatric/Aging Life Care Managers (GCM) serves family caregivers, medical professionals, and professional family advisors in Maryland and South/Central Pennsylvania. Caring for an individual who needs assistance due to aging, dementia, disability or serious illness can be challenging.

Don't go it alone. The Option Group has over 100 years of experience navigating the healthcare maze and has access to hundreds of resources to assist you.

MD: 410-667-0266
PA: 717-287-9900 / 610-885-8899
DE: 302-858-6449

https://theoptiongroup.net

Ellen Platt is the founder and owner of The Option Group, LLC.

She is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, Certified Care Manager, and a Certified Aging Life Care Manager. She has over 30 years of experience providing care management, advocacy, placement, and care coordination services to those with catastrophic injuries, chronic diseases, disabilities, and those that are aging and navigating longevity.

Under her leadership, The Option Group has been a trailblazer in the senior industry. The Option Group has worked tirelessly to collaborate with other leaders to provide high-quality services that help families navigate complex and emotional situations.

Ms. Platt is still dedicated to serving more clients with even more services to meet their needs.

Eldercare Locator

Locate area agencies on aging and other resources.

800-677-1116

https://eldercare.acl.gov/Public/Index.aspx

Lotsa Helping Hands

An app and website to easily communicate updates and coordinate care needs.

https://lotsahelpinghands.com

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Afterword

There are many difficult moments to navigate when our parents begin to depend on us for care.

Conflict among siblings can be a particularly harsh reality. However, in most instances, these challenges can be successfully managed and overcome. By taking steps to foster positive communication, supporting one another, and putting a plan in place to address issues as they arise, sibling relationships can become a wonderful source of strength and comfort as loved ones grow older. We hope you find this guide helpful along your journey.

At The Option Group, our caring team of certified Geriatric/Aging Life Care Managers is dedicated to providing the best options for each of our clients. If you or someone you know could benefit from our support or if you would like to learn more about our services, please contact us today:

E: info@theoptiongroup.net

W: theoptiongroup.net

MD: **410-667-0266**

PA: **717-287-9900 / 610-885-8899**

DE: **302-858-6449**

"The Option Group has been very responsive and helped in every way. A blessing in getting through all the crises with Dad. I'm thankful that your service exists. I don't know what would have happened without you."

-Nancy C.

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