

Managing Caregivers

Helpful tips

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Hiring caregivers is hard, necessary, and a hassle, but it is doable. We have had good success. I suspect it is easier when you have another person to share the burden with, and I suspect that the process of hiring has been easier for us because my husband is married to a rehab nurse! I'm confident he's a better manager than I am, and the length of time people have been with us is probably due to his personality and the way he manages caregivers.

~ Family Advisor

Personal Boundaries and Caregivers

Boundaries define limits and mark dividing lines. The purpose of a boundary is to keep different “turfs” and territories separate.

Personal boundaries can mean:

- The psychological, physical, and emotional space between you and someone else
- Morals and values
- Respect for yourself and others



Good personal boundaries are best maintained when you stay as independent as possible.

What do personal boundaries have to do with my care?

Personal boundaries set the “tone” for the relationship between you and your caregivers. Caregiving relationships are complex because you *have* to have help, and you may need very personal care. It can be hard to have family members or loved ones in that role. You feel vulnerable, even while you are grateful for their support.

Boundary problems that may occur when a family member is also the caregiver are:

- The caregiver takes over all decision-making, doing what they feel is “best.”
- The person receiving care expects the family caregiver to be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Some examples of boundary problems with hired caregivers are:

- The caregiver asks to borrow \$10 and doesn’t pay it back when promised.
- The person receiving care asks the caregiver to do tasks that are not required or part of their job description.

What does it mean to have good boundaries?

Good personal boundaries are maintained when you stay as independent as possible. This means directing your own care and making your own choices.

Some issues to watch for are:

- Worrying about being a burden
- Wanting to keep the caregiver “happy”
- Letting someone else make choices
- Not wanting to make your wishes known

Some of the benefits of keeping boundaries in place are:

- Taking control over what you can control
- Easing the burden of decision-making
- Having things done your way



Talk with your loved one about how adding caregiving may change your relationship.

What can I do to keep good boundaries?

Be assertive in your interactions with others. This doesn't mean you always get what you want, but it does mean that you get to express your needs and wants.

Here are examples of what it means to be *aggressive*, *passive*, *passive-aggressive*, and *assertive*:

- **Aggressive:** My way, or not at all.
- **Passive:** Your way, or not at all.
- **Passive-aggressive:** My way only, but you can think it's your way.
- **Assertive:** Let's negotiate – I want X and you want Y, so let's talk.

How do I keep strong boundaries with “unpaid” caregivers?

Think about how you normally are independent and assertive with your family and friends. Most likely, you talk about:

- What you need
- What they need
- How you want things done
- How they want things done

It can be harder to keep good boundaries when your caregiver is also your spouse, parent, or friend. Talk with your loved one about how adding caregiving may change your relationship. Talk over how to manage the relationship so you can maintain your role as spouse, parent, and child/parent. Talk about issues until you come to a solution you both can live with.

How do I keep strong boundaries with paid caregivers?

When you hire a caregiver, you are setting up a home-based business. Think about what you'd expect from yourself as a “good employee.”

Make sure your expectations are clear from the beginning of your relationship with a caregiver. This means agreeing on:

- Start and end times
- Job tasks
- Pay scale and pay dates
- How you will handle requests about time off and pay raises

What do I do if boundaries get blurred and complicated?

Boundaries will be challenged many times in any relationship, and especially in a relationship with a caregiver. Remember that you can always back up and start over. If you need help finding your way, you can ask peers, find resource guides, or get counseling if needed.

Caring for Your Caregivers

Counseling Services for Caregivers

In the Seattle area, your **unpaid caregiver** has access to counseling help through Evergreen Hospital in Kirkland, Washington. The program is funded by grants from United Way of King County and Seattle-King County Aging and Disability Services.

The counseling sessions focus on problem-solving, self-care, stress management, and helping the caregiver find the community resources and education programs that are available to them. The purpose of the counseling program is to help caregivers take better care of themselves. This also helps them provide better care.

Volunteer caregivers can call 206-923-6300 or 800-548-0558 for more information about this free counseling program.

Thoughts About Caregivers

These tips on dealing with hired caregivers come from a registered nurse whose husband has quadriplegia:

When Hiring a Paid Caregiver

- **Be flexible.** If possible, let go of any biases about gender, sexual preference, race, etc. We have had a wide range of people work for us – male and female, gay and straight, white, black, and Indian. The wider you leave the door open, the more possibilities there are. The bottom line for us is getting someone we trust who can do the job. Our focus is on whether they are a good, trustworthy person who can learn how to do the needed tasks.
- **Safety checks.** Do all the recommended safety checks before hiring a caregiver: personal and business references, and a Washington State Patrol check. If you have a bad feeling about someone, trust that feeling. Keep looking until you find the right caregiver for you.
- **Experience.** Almost anyone can learn the basic caregiving tasks, so don't worry too much about the past caregiving experience of someone you are thinking about hiring. Sometimes it is good to start with a clean slate. Most people can learn to catheterize, do a bowel program, do transfers, etc. Focus on the person's qualities and integrity. Know that you can teach them the specific tasks you need done.
- **Advertising.** There are many good ways to advertise for a caregiver. When placing an ad, give a short list of your requirements (such as DSHS "qualified preferred" or "experience preferred"). Here are some ideas for where to advertise:
 - The Craigslist website is an easy way to advertise online. There are other online resources for finding caregivers such as *www.caring.com*.
 - Posting for caregivers in local college newspapers or placing flyers at local schools or church bulletins can also be a good way to find caregivers.
 - Agencies can help you with hiring caregivers.
 - Don't forget about word of mouth. Your friends and your caregivers can help you find other caregivers.

- **Get help with the interview process.** Ask someone who knows you, cares about you, and is able to “read” people well to help you interview potential caregivers. Two heads are better than one.
- **Help yourself handle the stress.** Hiring a caregiver is hard and stressful, but it is doable. Try to make the process as effective and efficient as possible.
- **Don’t feel you have to do it all yourself.** If hiring is very hard for you and you cannot find the right caregiver for your needs, you can choose to have someone else do the hiring. A temporary employment agency can be an excellent resource, but they will charge a finder’s fee. One family hired a part-time speech pathologist to do the hiring, interviewing, and narrowing down the list to a couple of final candidates.
- **Get short-term help if needed.** It can be hard to find a long-term employee, so remember that there are resources when you need help right away. One family got a short-term caregiver through Family Resources. This worked out well until they were able to hire a long-term caregiver. There are a many Home Health care agencies that may be able to help you find short-term caregiving.
- **Network, network, network.** Whenever you can, connect with others who might be able to help you in the future – with hiring, with coverage when a caregiver needs a break or is on vacation, or with other tasks that need doing. Try to line up relief workers before you need them, by getting phone numbers and checking their rates ahead of time. When a crisis occurs, it is good to be as prepared as possible.

Working with Your Employee

- **Treat employees with respect.** Being polite, saying “please” and “thank you,” helps create good working relationships. At the same time, make sure it is clear who is in charge. You are the boss and have the final word. Be friendly, but keep your boundaries in place, so that it is clear that you are the boss and decision maker.

- **Give your caregiver time off.** Work out other resources so that you can your caregiver time off. Everyone needs a vacation to get refreshed.
- **Quality control.** From time to time, check to make sure the job you expect to have done is being done, and done the way you want. Even the best caregiver can slip into poor habits over time.
- **Be ready for the unexpected.** What if a caregiver walks out, or doesn't show up? Or what happens if you want to fire your employee? It is important to plan ahead for these types of situations. You may ask a friend or family member to be available to come in on an emergency-only basis, or you might have an agency you could call. Start figuring out now how to find a replacement in emergencies.

See "Care After Discharge," pages 49 to 68, for more information and thoughts about working with caregivers.

