

Retirement Guide

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How to survive long distance caregiving

For older adults, this has been presenting new challenges in aging. For the adult children, the meaning of distance is hard to solve even with technology. And, when it is time for families to have a conversation about how older adults wish to live the next part of their life - the holidays seem like a convenient time, but perhaps not. Sadly, this can often mean a conversation is delayed - until an emergency forces the issue without any discussion or planning.

Of course, families who live in the same area are not immune to emergencies, but when you live minutes instead of hours away, it's far easier to catch problems before they get out of hand. Given that you live in Boston, say, while your parents live in Florida, what steps can you take to compensate for geography?



Increase your telephone chats

For starters, make a point of **talking to your parents more frequently**, taking note of any forgetfulness, confusion or signs of stress or isolation. If anything seems out of sorts don't delay in booking a visit home. Being on the ground will allow you to better understand their situation. (While there, look for warning signs like problems walking or climbing stairs or changes in grooming, eating, or social activities, and try to accompany your parents to a doctor's appointment so you can speak to their physician in person.)

When talking with your parents either in person or on the phone, always look for openings where you can bring up topics such as health, senior living and end-of-life planning. Try to set up regular conference calls with your parents and other siblings (via phone or Skype) so you can talk about these issues and discuss decisions ahead of time.

Over time, you'll need to gather as much information as you can on your parents' health, prescription drugs, insurance coverage, overall financial situation and wishes around end-of-life care. Ideally, you'll be able to sit down with your parents and their lawyer as they draw up a will, a financial power of attorney and advance care directives - your life will be a whole lot smoother if these legal documents are in place.

Reach out for support

You'll also have to get a handle on is the sort of community resources available, like home health agencies and Meals on Wheels, as well as online resources like the **Eldercare Locator**. On top of this, it's crucial to have contact info for the following people in your parents' life:

- Friends
- Neighbors
- Physicians
- Pharmacist
- Financial adviser
- Lawyer

If you are worried about your parents' well-being and they resist moving to a senior living community, consider hiring a home health agency or a geriatric care manager, who can evaluate your parents' needs and begin a monitored plan of care. (If finances are an issue, the local **National Association of Area Agencies on Aging** may offer free advocacy services.) At the very least, ask a neighbor to regularly check on your parents and report back to you.

As a long-distance caregiver, you can't anticipate all the potential problems that could crop up, but hopefully preparing in advance will buffer you and your loved ones from any major storms.

*A few months back, Holiday published **Tackling Tough Conversations**, a digital book adult children and older adults can download to get thoughts about how to have a conversation about senior living as a family. The popular guide has been read by thousands. Feel free to **download a copy for yourself** and call a local **Holiday Retirement community** if you have more questions.*

Our Communities

United States

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Arizona	Idaho	Massachusetts	New Hampshire	Pennsylvania	Wisconsin
Arkansas	Illinois	Michigan	New Jersey	South Carolina	Wyoming
California	Indiana	Minnesota	New Mexico	South Dakota	
Colorado	Iowa	Mississippi	New York	Tennessee	
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