



You and your parents live far apart. As your parents' needs increase due to declining health or changing circumstances, you become concerned about their safety and well-being. From a distance, you try to help them obtain appropriate support services. When this occurs, you become a **long-distance caregiver**.

You and your parents may begin an exploration of:

- Their evolving circumstances
- How to create an appropriate safety net
- Level of assistance they want from you

A challenge for you is to work with your parents at their level of acceptance.

After talking with you, your parents may respond in different ways:

- They make positive changes, and welcome your help.
- They make some changes, but in your opinion some big risks remain.
- They make no changes and do not welcome your involvement.

The unfolding chain of events is a journey for both you and your parent(s)!

In order to develop a meaningful plan, expect to have several conversations. Remember, as an adult child, your affection and support is very important and cannot be replaced by anyone you hire.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LONG-DISTANCE MANAGING

Assess Needs and Identify Local Resources

As soon as possible, visit your parents to assess the situation. Take note of problem areas and gather information about available resources:

- *Before* visiting, contact the **Eldercare Locator**, a public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging, **1-800-677-1116**. The Eldercare Locator connects older Americans and their caregivers with sources of information on senior services. They provide information about services and how to access them. Ask about individual counseling, support groups and caregiver training, respite care and supplemental services, such as transportation, emergency response systems, home modifications and assistive technologies.
- To more easily locate resources for your parents, take home a telephone book from their community.
- Schedule doctor appointments to coincide with your visits so you may become familiar with the doctor and his or her staff. For each of their physicians, when your parents complete HIPPA forms (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), they may authorize you to have access to their medical information.



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The Housing Bureau for Seniors is a community-supported service of the University of Michigan Health System. We adhere to a policy of equal opportunity and non-discrimination.

04/2006



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061426CMAF

Do You and Your Parents Live Far Apart?

Are You Becoming a Long-Distance Caregiver?



Establish Local Contacts

It is important to have one or more contacts in your parents' community who will:

- Check-in daily
- Be trusted with their home key
- Respond to an emergency
- Maintain contact with you

Suggestions for setting up a daily “check-in” system

- Discuss this with your parents and have them suggest someone.
- If your parents cannot identify a person, consider hiring someone. Contact **Professional Care Managers** who specialize in assessing and monitoring the needs of the elderly. Names are available from the National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers, www.caremanagers.com.
- If your parents belong to a faith community, make contact to see if they provide senior outreach programs. They may do friendly visiting or offer other support services.

Ask your parents for a key to their home. Make duplicates of anything needed to gain access to their home such as keys, swipe cards or passwords, and distribute these to designated helpers.



Have Legal Matters in Order

Discuss having legal and financial affairs in order.

- It is very important that a Power of Attorney is in place for finances and health care. If your parent becomes unable to handle their finances or make health care decisions, a Power of Attorney is a necessary legal tool to facilitate these matters.
- Advance directives or living wills are also important for end-of-life wishes.
- Request a copy of important papers and telephone numbers.

Know Your Parents' Medical Information

During an emergency it may not be possible for your parents to provide crucial information. Consider developing a ‘Personal Health Record’ with a complete medical history. Visit www.myphr.com for more information.

As an alternative, assemble a health care notebook and have identical information for your parents, you and other helpers:

- Name, address, telephone and fax numbers of doctors, the local hospital and pharmacy
- Health insurance type and policy numbers (such as Medicare or Medicaid, Long-Term Care). Consider photocopying all health insurance cards.
- Your parent's medical history
- A list of medications, (prescription and over-the-counter), along with dosages. Update this periodically.
- Copies of medical test results

- A copy of advance directives
- Your parents' social security numbers

If they are hospitalized, encourage your parents to bring the health care notebook to the emergency room or hospital. Since you will want the medical staff to talk with you, make sure you keep copies of any signed permission giving you **the right to medical access**. This way if you have to show proof, it will be readily available to necessary parties.



Some other options to consider when developing a long-distance care plan for your parents

- Check if local pharmacies or grocery stores will deliver. This is very important if your parents should become homebound for an extended period of time.
- If you use email, ask others for their email addresses. It makes communicating much easier.
- Program important numbers into your cell phone to reduce time looking for numbers in an emergency.

- Create an emergency travel plan for yourself with necessary transportation information and names of your workplace colleagues who need to be notified of your absence.
- Discuss with your parents the use of an emergency alert system. This can provide some security in case there is a need for immediate help.
- Explore automatic deposit of social security and other income.
- Where possible, have bills paid electronically.
- If your parents are in assisted living or a nursing home, be sure to establish a good working relationship with the staff. Check with staff on a regular basis to ask for their observations or input regarding your parents.
- Be an advocate for your parents if they are in a care setting. Make sure they are getting what they need. You should be able to request their care plans and to discuss this with the staff. Make sure the staff knows your wishes. Do you want to be called before your parent goes to the emergency room or soon after? Do you want medication changes to be discussed with you prior to a change being made? If your parents are in a nursing home, make sure you participate in care conferences. If you cannot be there in person, ask if you can participate by using a speaker phone.

If you have learned something from your experience that may be passed along to others, please contact our Housing Counseling Coordinator at housingbureau@umich.edu or call 734-998-9339.