

Caregivers for a Loved One: Family Life and Disability

By: Jessica Holmes

It is emotionally challenging enough to deal with the shock of finding that a loved one has a disability. The obstacles continue, up until and including, when the time comes to provide a caregiver for your loved one. Thus, it is important to know what to look for when finding a caregiver so that you know your family member is in good hands.

Often times, the person with the disability does not realize that he/she needs care, or doesn't want to recognize it. After all, it can be distressing to know that one cannot care for themselves independently. That is when a family member must step in, as hard as it may be, so that the right choices can be made and a caregiver can give proper aid to the family.

When deciding what type of care should be given, it is best to look at the needs and characteristics of the disabled person. Does he/she get homesick easily? If so, it might be best to find a caregiver who can come to the house on a regular basis, or permanently. Does he/she have a special need for socializing? If so, you can consider putting your loved one in an assisted living facility with other people. Does the person have a tendency towards depression? In that case, it may be good to hire someone who is upbeat and can give good companionship.

Something to look at is the level of care that your loved one needs. Some disabled people can be very independent and handle most household chores, but just need help with a couple of activities. In that case, they need minimum assistance. Moderate assistance is needed when the person requires help with more essential chores, such as bathing or cooking. A person who needs maximum assistance, however, is one who is unable to care for himself and requires either someone living in the home at all times or an assisted living facility. In extreme cases, if a family member is close to death, a hospice is the best option. If a family member cares for this person themselves, it will most likely be a physical, emotional, and mental challenge.

At-Home Care

If the best option for your loved one is to get at-home care, there are a few considerations to keep in mind. All rooms in the house should be at one level and there should be enough room in the house for the person, plus a wheelchair walker, commode, etc. Make sure that there is a hospital unit nearby and/or a doctor, nurse, or specialist available to provide extra care if needed, with money to hire additional help. Also, the disabled person must agree to having this caregiver. It is hard to accept the fact that someone will be moving in and taking over, especially in someone's own home, so the family should be understanding of that.

The caregiver must be able to provide medication, meals, cleaning, shopping, and overall personal care. Also, there is no good in providing any of these if the caregiver does not give companionship. It is healthy to have a strong bond between the two so that it is easier to carry out the duties and vice versa. This option can be a positive one, especially since savings in health care cost for the family can be great. However, home care may not be possible, considering the person's conditions, the home's layout, and the

person's desire to be fully independent. When choosing a caregiver for your loved one, some characteristics to look for are emotional and physical capabilities, ability to communicate, training, ability to work under stress, good health, and the ability to be able to make the person who is receiving care feel useful and needed,

Facility/Housing Options

If at-home care is not for your family, another step to take is community living. Independent living, with single family homes, apartment buildings, etc, is for those who are fully independent. Semi-independent options are available and include meals, housekeeping, and assistance with medications and diets. For those who are completely unable to care for themselves, there are also nursing homes available or foster homes, which have a primary caregiver for small groups of people.

Before using one of these options, make sure that there is a probation period in case the person is not happy with the facility. Find out how many people are on staff and how much training they have had. Also, meet the doctor, if the person has to use a new doctor in this facility. Find out what the facility does if the person becomes immobile or combative. Before signing a contract or lease, READ it, ask for a copy, review the owner's financial status, read the state inspection report, and ask to see the facility's license. Be aware of the person's rights while residing in the facility. Residents may have visitors, voice concerns, and have all the freedom that any US citizen can have. Their rooms are private and staff must knock before entering. Only the doctor can order a restraint, and even then it must be completely necessary. A person can leave the facility anytime, regardless of what their family, or even doctor, says.

If your loved one does enter one of these facilities, friends and family should visit as much as possible. Send cards or small gifts between visits and always try to keep up the lines of communication, to avoid isolation and loneliness. It is better to make sure that the person's life changes as less as possible. Walk around with the person on visits, if possible, to keep up exercise and being outdoors. Develop a positive relationship with the staff and always keep communication with them. After all, your loved one is in their hands.