

"Sibling issues is one of the toughest aspects of caregiving." - Carol O'Dell

Siblings often take on different roles & responsibilities through the caregiving process. Factors that may affect caregiving responsibilities include:

- Gender of the siblings
- Employment status
- Proximity to the care receiver
- Other family responsibilities
- Personality of siblings

Gender

Most often, sisters become care coordinators and contribute more hands-on care. Brothers typically wait to be asked to help or respond to a specific need. If all siblings are sisters, the one who is viewed as the leader will typically take the lead during the caregiving process.

Employment

Employment impacts how much caregiving siblings give. Part-time workers may give up their jobs to take on caregiving tasks. People with flexible schedules build their work time around care required- even if this means working later hours or weekends.

Proximity

How close a child lives to the parent often reflects the time they contribute to care. Children nearby often give more care than those who live at a distance. Engage all family partners to explore ways to participate in care. Ideas might include: research online, offer respite, make phone calls to offer support.

Other Responsibilities

Other responsibilities may affect how much time an adult child can provide a parent. Nurturing their marriage, parenting a family, personal health concerns or care for in-laws are only a few examples.

Personality

Individual personality styles evolve during caregiving situations. Those who like to take the lead will step up; some who avoid stressful situations dodge responsibilities. Siblings may offer to provide care with "ulterior" motives such as inheritance or to earn parental approval. Rivalry issues may become intense during this time.

Siblings take on responsibilities based on how much caregiving they want to do, feel they can do, or are expected to do. Do not let the respective factors determine what you do as a caregiver. Instead, let the information help you better understand what a sibling may be dealing with. Do what you can and hope that they are doing what they can.

Caregiving for a parent needs to be shared no matter what factors are influencing adult children. While siblings may not contribute equally, it is important for all to contribute and share the care.

Identify factors that are affecting you or your siblings' ability to take on more caregiving responsibility.

What other factors not mentioned are affecting how you or your siblings care for your parents?

What can you do to work better with your siblings to share the care?

For more information, read:

Taking Care of Aging Family Members by Wendy Lustbader & Nancy Hooyman, The Free Press, 1993.

This tip sheet is part of a series:

Caregiving Relationships: For People Who Care for Adults

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