



EAP Educates: Caring for an elderly relative.

Caring for an elderly relative(s) can be a very stressful experience. An elderly person living with you can cause problems around privacy, roles and disciplining children. Elderly relatives can also put a strain on your financial resources causing you to feel angry because of the burden you perceive them to create.

Elderly relatives and the family

In order to ensure that conflicts are minimized, and that everyone can co-exist co-operatively, the following issues should be discussed initially with the elderly relative and reinforced periodically when problems arise.

- **Ensuring your and the elderly relative's privacy**
You and your family need time together with the elderly relative, and time together without him / her. Private time as a couple is also important for a successful marriage. You and your partner need to decide what time you want as a couple and as a family alone, and this needs to be communicated to the elderly relative in a sensitive and caring manner. The elderly relative can feel rejected and hurt and so explaining why this is necessary may be helpful in protecting their feelings.
- **Disciplining children**
The essence of a "happy family" is co-operation among its members. You and your partner need to co communicate with the elderly relative what you expect in terms of them disciplining your children. Whatever you decide must be consistent and fair to both your children and the elderly relative. Remember not to contradict the elderly relative in front of the children if you have given them the authority to discipline your children.
- **Roles and responsibilities**
Roles in the family can become confused with an elderly parent around. Elderly parents can be seen to "take over" the mothering and parental roles, leaving the parents feeling angry and threatened. Roles should be clarified from the onset to ensure there is no confusion amongst the members as to what role belongs to whom, i.e. the mother is the mother and the grandparent is the grandparent. An elderly parent does need to feel purposeful and useful. Have a look at your setup, taking into account the physical abilities of the person, and see what responsibilities they could pick up.
- **Financial concerns**
If you are to be supporting your elderly relative, it is important from the beginning to decide what financial resources you can give them and what you can't. They need to also know that there is not an endless supply of money and by showing them some of the family budget; you can help them to understand this. If the elderly relative has an income, you may want some small contribution from them so that you don't feel used and financially pressed.

Elderly relatives and you

Caring for an elderly relative can also be difficult for you as an individual and can add increased pressure to your already busy life. Some of the most common concerns include:

- **Conflicting responsibilities**
Having an extra person to care from can be very time consuming. Ensure you make time to nurture yourself so that you can manage effectively with your increased responsibility.
- **Guilt about not doing enough**
Trying to find enough hours in the day to spend time with everyone may be impossible. Work out a schedule when you can spend some quality time with your ageing relative. Regularly check with them that they're content and that they feel their needs are being met. This will eliminate any needless worry.