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*Handbook
for
Caretakers*

MAPPING THE
D.R.I.V.E
TO CARE FOR LOVED ONES

Mapping the D.R.I.V.E to Care for Loved Ones

Introduction

Times have changed and families live far from each other . More and more people are waiting until they are older to have children, or are having children in a second or third marriage.

One study states that one out of every eight Americans between 40 and 60 years of age are both raising a child *and* caring for an elderly parent. Often the family member lives out of state and is traveling to manage the care of the parent. People who combine childcare with caring for older or disabled relatives is found more frequently. **The elderly population continues to increase for people are living longer and healthier lives.**

Caring for older loved ones is a difficult process involving physical needs, emotional challenges and individualized situations. Each of these challenges can be complex and require time, resources and support. It may be a long journey with many valleys, hills and forks in the road. This journey can sometimes be a very long D.R.I.V.E.

D.R.I.V.E is an acronym to identify some of these areas of need and give tips and insight about to how to manage the care of an elderly or disabled loved one.

Mapping the Journey for the D.R.I.V.E

D.R.I.V.E

D – Diligently Prepare

R – Resources

I – Independence

V – Village (it takes a)

E – Education

Chapter 1 – DRIVE

Diligently Prepare

The journey to care for a loved ones begins with a conversation. In some cases, the doctor will start the discussion with your loved one about his or her care needs when they have cause for concern. Possibly there is a fall or other issue that sparks this conversation.

Starting this critical conversation with a loved one can be emotionally painful. These discussions may be one of the hardest parts of the journey. You may be ready to talk about the sensitive subject of illness or loss of independence, but your loved ones have been resisting the conversation for some time. It's possible your loved ones may have been the ones trying to talk to you, but this conversation is very uncomfortable for you and therefore have been putting it off for another time. Tell yourself and others that the time has come to talk openly and lovingly about the topic of preparing for loss of independence, illness, care taking, and the future needs of loved ones who may be losing their independence.

Chapter 1 – DRIVE

Diligently Prepare

Resistance to change and the need for care is a challenge that many people face when talking with loved ones. No one wants to be dependent. The thought of leaving ones home or having someone come in to help in the home may be frightening and prohibit the conversation. By keeping your loved one involved in decisions and having these critical conversations, you will help your loved one feel more comfortable about accepting help and support for the transitions as they occur.

One key point for success is that the sooner the conversation is begun the better the outcome. Talking openly can prepare everyone to start supporting any needs or maintaining independence. Ideally all parties should feel as if they are being heard and that their needs are understood. Be positive and encouraging. The future is not perfectly predictable, but starting this conversation will allow future discussions to be more comforting rather than stressful

Chapter 2-DRIVE

Resources - Find Them

Finding the resources for support of a loved one may be challenging, but there are resources available. Prior to illness support will have to be paid for mostly out of pocket, for insurance and medicare will only support illness and recovery. **Generally speaking, insurance is not usually beneficial when caring for someone who is still well.**

Home care allows a person with special needs to stay in their home by providing services, equipment and support. It might be for people who are getting older, people who are chronically ill, someone recovering from surgery, or people who are disabled. Home care services include things like:

1. Personal care - help with bathing, washing hair, or getting dressed
2. Homemaking - cleaning, yard work, laundry cooking or delivering meals
3. Health care - having a home health aide come to the home to assist with medical needs, transportation to doctor appointments and healthcare advocacy.

Chapter 2-DRIVE

Resources – Find Them

Most any type of help that is needed in the home is available. Some types of care and community services are free or donated. Seek the Department of Aging Services, County Disabled Services or Community Senior Centers. If they are not able to help, then they usually have someone else to refer you to.

Keep your primary care physician and all physicians involved and informed. If illness does strike, then federal, state, or other insurance will be more likely to pay for services. Rehabilitation either inpatient, day treatment or home services are usually paid for after an illness or recovery from surgery or fall.

The best way to continue independence is to evaluate for issues and then support the weak areas before they become problems.

Chapter 3 – DRIVE

Independence is Key

The key to independence is to create a better, safer, and more supportive environment for a loved one in their own home. There are modifications that can be made to make sure that the home is safer for the older adult. **Begin with an evaluation of the home environment by a home health nurse, occupational therapist or physical therapist.**

Some of the environmental modifications that are often recommended are a hand-held shower, a shower seat, bathtub grab-bars, or a bedside commode. Barriers to using wheelchairs and walkers (such as door sills) can be identified and removed. Chair lifts and outdoor ramps can be recommended when it is difficult to navigate stairs. An assessment by a professional could help to identify useful assistive devices for hygiene, dressing, housekeeping or other home chores. They can also evaluate the safety of the home and suggest modifications.

The sooner these modifications are done, the less the risk for loss of independence becomes.

Chapter 4 - DRIVE

Village - is what it takes

Technology can assist to bring safety to the home of loved ones who are at risk. **Technology can support home safety and bring comfort to people who are anxious about being home bound, yet do not want to leave their homes.**

. Some examples of the ways that technology can assist would be by providing necklace or wrist radio devices that allow loved ones to call for help when they can't get to the phone. There are also emergency response systems that require someone to push a button by a certain time each day. If they do not push the button, it will trigger an emergency response or checkup phone call. Newer technologies can provide help in tracking medications and monitoring or even transmitting vital signs. Telemedicine can connect people to healthcare providers through audio and visual screens. The home can be equipped with automated systems to adjust heating and lighting, to allow doors to be opened and closed with remote devices, and to simply video monitor activity throughout the home.

Chapter 4 - DRIVE

Village - is what it takes

Although technology is amazing and can help in many ways, you should never underestimate the value of neighbors and friends. During critical or even non-critical times, there are people who can provide check-ins and oversight. Most neighbors are willing to engage in oversight by checking in on people. Collecting the mail, offering to pick up grocery items, or even just visiting will bring even more interactions and check points . All possible neighborhood and village options should be considered. Contact and meet with people and be sure everyone has the phone number of the immediate family.

More frequent visits by family members will not only provide comfort but also give more information and clues to the possible challenges that are evolving to prevent folks from living independently. To see someone for a visit once a week does little to provide true information about the day to day stresses of independent living. Visit more frequently and stay longer, begin to go to all physician appointments with the loved one, call more frequently, and become more engaged in their every day life. The more information that is gathered, the easier it will be to know what is needed to support safety and independence for as long as possible.

Chapter 5 – DRIVE

Educate – Yourself and Others

We are in an age of information. This means all we need is available to us, so ignorance is a choice.

Read articles about caring for elderly loved ones and join groups on Facebook who post about their own experiences. Speak regularly with the primary care physician and other physicians to find out what they expect will be needed in the future. Keep as many people in the loop as possible, and learn from each of them. Watch YouTube videos, join community MeetUp groups, and find that the information and resources are just a phone call or an appointment away.

Before a crisis and the need for critical decisions, collect information such as medication lists, pharmacy phone numbers and physicians and their address and phone numbers. Look up the medications and why they are being taken, or speak to the pharmacists who are excellent resources about medication interactions and side effects. Gather information and educate yourself.

Chapter 5 – DRIVE

Educate – Yourself and Others

Share the information you acquire with other family members. Keep as many people up to date on the status of the loved one so that there is a team of educated people. Knowing all of this information is vital during times of change or crisis. It will bring insight to any difficulty and assist in preventing further issues or at least noticing them earlier. Education can be supported with social media. Many people are willing to read and interact as part of the team through a social media site. This will allow those who are out of town to be up to date on the status and the information. It also gives a team approach to learning as all who wish to help can assist by looking up information and posting it for the team to see.

Being aware of the current issues will allow you to anticipate and prepare for the future. **Education is about knowing what is presently going on and then anticipating challenges, and being ready for them.**

Being up to date on all medications, diagnosis and potential challenges is preparation. As issues come up, work with them as they occur using the information and insight gathered by all team members.

Conclusion

D.R.I.V.E.

D - Diligently Prepare

R - Resources

I - Independence

V - Village (it takes a)

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The actions we take preemptively will pay off with better outcomes. Independence is a goal that we all want to maintain for the rest of our lives.

To support as a caregiver means to be proactive about doing what it takes to prepare **D**iligently, to gather **R**esources that will support **I**ndependence. Do not try to do this alone, for it takes a **V**illage. **E**ducate yourself and those who are on your team so you can be the best possible caregiver you are able to be.

Knowledge is key in providing the best care. With it you will have piece of mind. To assist with caregiving in the best possible way, will leave one with a sense of peace, regardless of the situation. Acting in this way does not leave you with regret for it is an honor, a gift and a blessing to care for others.

Be empowered by your actions and go forth with love.