

# Caregiving Corner

Resources & Solutions for Caregivers

## Get Organized! Family and Communication

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As school ends for the summer break, a familiar sight hits retail venues across all areas – the preparation for the incoming stock of school supplies, binders, notebooks, book bags – all of these items represent one of the main functions of school supplies themselves, that is, to keep students organized. There is much that can be taken from the massive industry that creates and sells school supplies each year. Namely, we as adults should probably take the opportunity each year (or every few months) to reorganize our lives and the affairs we must keep in order. For caregivers who have double-duty taking care of their own affairs as well as managing those of a loved one, organization is key. This series of articles will offer trips about organization and what areas are most important to focus on for caregivers.

We'll begin with organizing your family – now, that may seem impossible, but it is not as daunting as it sounds. Communication amongst caregiving families is critical and it is very important to decide early on in the caregiving process which members will “oversee” certain parts. Think of assigning chores as a youth – maybe you lucked out and didn't have any, but for those of us who did, we remember that we didn't always have a choice about which duties were our responsibility. As an adult, this is your chance to choose responsibilities based on your strengths and weaknesses. For example, if you have one or more siblings, one of you may have developed into the more patient one, or the more financially savvy sibling.

Or, you may even have a sibling whose career lends itself to designating that person as being responsible for a certain aspect of your loved one's life. People who are lawyers, financial consultants, or professional organizers generally do well when simply applying those skills to their aging parents. Designating which family member will be responsible for direct care, emergency contact, financial assistance, and legal advice is all critical to bringing order to the caregiving experience.

Communication is taken for granted in many families, but for some it may be more difficult. As you begin the process of organizing the family members to determine how responsibilities are divided, communication is important for making sure that this process does not generate feelings of resentment or anger. Whether you call together the family for a meeting to talk about things or just solicit opinions, be sure to include everyone and don't make assumptions. It is surprising how many stories there are about families who assume that one member will happily be the power of attorney only to find out that person would rather contribute in a different way. If you have preferences, either as the caregiver or as the person being cared for, communicate them to your family. Your family may not feel ready to delve into caregiving, but people are always better doing things they'd like to be doing rather than things that they reluctantly agree to.

Once you and your family have clearly communicated about how the

caregiving tasks will be divided up, organization of other matters should come more easily. Stay tuned for tips in organizing the documents that are critical to have on hand for anyone you may be caring for.