

The dos and don'ts of being a caregiver ally



Most of us will be caregivers at some point in our lives. Whether it's for an aging parent, a child with unique needs, a spouse recovering from a procedure, a neighbor navigating a tough diagnosis, or even yourself, family caregiving takes many forms across all phases of life.

If you're not currently in a position of caring for a loved one, it's a great opportunity to support those in your life who are. Here are some dos and don'ts of being a meaningful ally to the family caregivers you know.

Do

- ✓ **Ask how they are really doing.**
Caregivers spend most of their days thinking about their loved ones, and forget to check-in with themselves. Ask how they are really doing to encourage them to shift their thinking inwards.
- ✓ **Bring them prepared food.**
Similar to other daily needs, caregivers often prioritize their loved ones' meals over their own. Check something off of their to-do list by providing them with a healthy, nourishing meal.
- ✓ **Keep them included.**
Family caregivers tend to miss occasions because they are busy caring. Don't stop inviting them to gatherings if they haven't been able to show up. Instead, continue to include them and let them know you'll always be there.
- ✓ **Be a listening ear.**
Sometimes all it takes to relieve stress is expressing thoughts or feelings that are bottled up inside. Being there for a family caregiver in your life to simply vent can do wonders in helping them feel less alone.

Don't

- ✓ **Don't ask "How can I help?".**
Posing an open-ended question puts family caregivers in a position to come up with an idea or solution. Instead, be specific when phrasing a question, such as, "Can I pick up any groceries for you?".
- ✓ **Don't tell them to prioritize themselves.**
Even well-intentioned comments can be frustrating for family caregivers to hear. It's impossible to understand what a caregiver is experiencing, so don't offer unsolicited advice that's easier said than done.
- ✓ **Don't say "I don't know how you do it".**
It's likely that the caregiver doesn't know how they do it either, or doesn't feel that they are doing an adequate job. They may not have had a choice about being a caregiver, and they are just doing their best.
- ✓ **Don't create more work for them.**
Be mindful of well-intentioned gestures that may actually add to a family caregiver's to-do list. For instance, don't send flowers that will need watering, or a book to read.