THE ART AND SCIENCE OF ELDER CARE

9 Essential Steps to Assembling Your Care Partner Team

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1) Include the Elder

Every Elder, no matter what their apparent limitations, should be at the center of their own decision-making, or the person who knows her best.

Then, consider who else is a part of her life and should be included on the team.

It helps to start by thinking about a usual day; when does she rise, and who is there to assist with personal care or breakfast? Mentally go through the next 24 hours, and make notes about activities and rest periods, and who or what provides support to the Elder on a daily basis. These are the folks that are most likely to know your loved one’s preferences and be able to speak for her if she cannot speak for herself.

When you’ve done a typical day, think about a typical week. Is the routine different on some days? Is there a faith community connection at some point during the week? What about aide or nursing visits, massage, acupuncture, visits from neighbors? What is the arrangement for transportation to appointments and shopping? Make a note of these people and activities; they are part of the care partner team, too.

Next, look at a whole month. Who connects with the Elder on a less-frequent basis, such as physicians, attorneys, distant adult children and grandchildren?

You can even consider the year; is there an annual family reunion to keep in mind? What is important to the Elder about these infrequent but highly meaningful events?

Consider the patterns of interaction here, and map out who is closest to the Elder in terms of time spent, but also of emotional closeness. Don’t forget the daily telephone calls the Elder may have with a friend or sibling, even one she sees only rarely.
2) **Have a meeting**

Consider a meeting to bring together as many of the care partner team members as can attend. (Consider Skype or a phone conference to include out-of-town folks). There are two reasons to convene a care partner team meeting, and I suggest you do both on a regular basis.

- **One reason is to connect around specific needs or to address changes in any member of the care partner team, including the Elder.** These are working meetings, where you will review what is working well, and consider areas that need improvement. You will brainstorm these issues and solutions, agree to try specific solutions, and set a time to review how well they’ve worked.

- **Another reason to get together is to celebrate the joys of life and living that are being experienced, and the connections you all share.** Has there been a new birth in the family? Has the Elder made progress with physical therapy, or finished a precious scrapbook? Share these events with laughter and applause and some good food. (It doesn’t have to be complicated – how about ice cream???)

You might decide your gatherings can serve both purposes at the same time. Go for it!

3) **Consider individual strengths & Elder preferences**

If you are working to create a functional team, you will want to highlight the skills and interests and abilities of each member. Some folks have a special touch when it comes to personal care, others are skilled at managing finances or have a knack for broaching difficult topics.

Don’t forget the little things that make life worth living; who is able to spend time with the Elder writing greeting cards? Who can apply nail polish, while chatting about what’s going on?

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Remember that in every interaction, you want to strive for growth of every member of the care partner team, including the Elder herself. Asking her to share her stories and make choices (even if it’s just to ask what color of nail polish is preferred) create
opportunities for her to give as well as to receive care and for all members of the care partner team to receive, too.

4) Rotate unpleasant or difficult tasks

What is “unpleasant” or “difficult” may be a matter of individual preference.

If no one likes to help with the laundry, taking out the garbage, or grocery shopping, try to rotate these tasks to different team members. That way, no one gets “stuck” with a crummy job. If you’ve opened up your thinking about who is on the team, you may also find people who are more than willing to do some of these tasks!

5) Make a schedule

People are generally happy to help if they know what is expected, and can plan for it. You can use a shared calendar on the computer; consider a web-based system such as “Share the Care” to let everyone know what the needs are, and to solicit volunteers. You’ll find them at www.sharethecare.org.

6) Communicate well


In communicating with your Elder loved one, remember that she may have more clarity at some times of day than others. Pick the best time to start a conversation about care.

You will also want to reduce distractions by turning off the radio or television, making sure the Elder has hearing aids in and glasses on, if they’re used, and that the room is comfortable and free of glare from lights.

If your older loved one has special communication difficulty due to dementia or stroke, learn the techniques that can help you both bridge the gap and overcome communication problems.

7) Thank the team

When people help out, be sure to thank them (this could be a task you delegate, too!).
8) Ensure everyone is receiving care as well as giving it

Make a habit of checking on the different members of the care partner team to ensure that everyone is getting the best balance, that they are receiving care and not just giving it. Talking about the idea that the Elder has something important to offer will help the team think differently about the work they’re doing.

9) Ensure the Elder is giving care as well as receiving it

Something simple, like asking an Elder to rub lotion into your hands after you’ve done hers, can provide a powerful sense of that balance!

_The concept of Care Partnership was created by The Eden Alternative™_
_You can find out more about this person-directed philosophy of care at_
[www.edenalt.org](http://www.edenalt.org)

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