

Senior Pastoral Care: Long Distance Caregiving

Excerpts from “So Far Away” - National Institute on Aging

“What can I really do from far away?”

Long distance caregiving can take many forms. It can be helping with finances or money management, arranging for in-home care, or possibly providing respite care for the primary caregiver (if there is one). It may also include creating a plan in case of emergencies. Many long distance caregivers act as information coordinators, helping parents understand the confusing maze of new needs, including home health aides, insurance benefits and claims, and durable medical equipment.

When you live far away, some detective work might be in order to uncover possible signs that support, or help, is needed. A phone call around dinner time with a question such as “What’s cooking?” might help you find out if your loved one is eating nutritiously. An extended visit to the home can help you observe daily living skills or any areas of the home that need repair or safety modifications. An extended visit can also help you to assess general health and a person’s mood. Sometimes people confuse depression in an older person as a normal part of the aging process. You may also ask your loved one if there is a neighbor, friend, or doctor that they see regularly, and if it would be OK for you to check in with this person or have them call you if there is a concern. A daily phone call provides emotional support and connection, as well as a chance to notice recurring concerns that can be addressed in a later visit.

Some long-distance caregivers can also provide online help by researching health problems or medicines, paying bills, or keeping family and friends updated. You may be able to help your parent pay for care or step in to manage finances.

Caregiving is not easy for anyone, not for the caregiver or the care recipient. When you don’t live where the care is needed, it may be especially hard to feel that what you are doing is enough and that what you are doing is important. It often is.

If you would like information to help you to decide what type of care may be needed, call St. Martin’s Senior Pastoral Care 229-1111 Tues.-Friday 9:00-11:00 or email: martha@stmartinswmbg.org

Next week: “What information should a caregiver keep track of”