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## **Sharing Responsibilities [1]**

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 04/2015

### **Key Messages:**

- It is important to talk openly and set clear expectations when sharing caregiving tasks.
- Allow family members to help in the ways that they are able, depending on their abilities, lifestyles, and schedules.
- Consider seeking outside help from friends, relatives, and volunteer organizations.

Caring for a person with cancer often brings families together, with members providing mutual support to one another. However, the pressures of caregiving may also bring back old family conflicts or create new ones. Renewed or new conflicts can make it difficult for family members to work together.

Families that express their feelings in a healthy way and work together can resolve caregiving conflicts more easily. Families in which members solve problems alone and tend to disagree might have more difficulty coping. It is important for families to recognize and discuss how they react to stressful events.

### **Potential conflicts**

Potential sources of conflict among caregiving families include:

**Unequal division of caregiving duties.** Typically, one family member takes the lead in caring for the person who has cancer. He or she manages the majority of the caregiving tasks alone. This situation can make the caregiver feel overwhelmed, frustrated, and resentful, and other family members may feel left out.

**Disagreement on caregiving decisions.** There may be differences of opinion about financial, medical, and daily caregiving decisions.

**Differences in coping styles.** Family members may react differently to their caregiving tasks and have different ways of coping with their emotions.

**Falling into old family roles.** The relationship between family members may, at times, switch back to when each member was younger. For example, siblings may find that they begin to deal with conflicts similarly to the way they did when younger. Or, one family member may take on too many tasks and feel resentful toward others who are doing less.

## **Working together as caregivers**

Although resolving family conflicts can be challenging and uncomfortable, it is important to address issues quickly. This makes the family better able to provide high-quality care to the person with cancer. Each family member should consider whether it is more important to be right or to provide support.

The following suggestions can help families work together to become a supportive network.

- Expect and accept family members' differences of opinion and coping styles.
- Involve the person with cancer, if possible. He or she should always be a central part of all care-related discussions and actions.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help with caregiving responsibilities, and learn how to graciously accept it.
- Appreciate family members who are trying to help, even if the help is not exactly what you needed
- Be realistic in dividing up caregiving tasks. Allow family members to help in the ways that they are able. And, assign tasks according to each person's abilities, lifestyles, and schedules.
- Caregiving tasks will vary day to day and week to week. Encourage family members to remain flexible and pitch in when others need extra help.
- Get outside help from friends, relatives, and volunteer organizations.
- Be an example to others in the family by [taking care of yourself physically and emotionally](#) [3].
- Use [online tools](#) [4] that allow you to schedule tasks and communicate information. That way, all family members and other caregivers can get the latest information by connecting to the Internet.
- Keep in mind that you are all working towards the same goal of helping the person with cancer, even if there are different ways to achieve this goal.

## **Family meetings**

It may be helpful to hold regularly scheduled family meetings. This is a time to encourage family and friends on the caregiving team to discuss issues and concerns. Those who cannot attend in

person may want to join by phone. During these meetings, everyone should respectfully listen to others yet also express their opinions.

## Counseling

Some families may need professional help, such as [counseling](#) [5], to resolve their differences. In counseling, family members talk about their problems and receive guidance and advice from a trained mental health professional. A counselor can help families find solutions to specific, immediate problems.

By working together, a family can provide effective care with the least possible amount of conflict.

## More Information

[Family Life](#) [6]

[Communicating with Loved Ones](#) [7]

[When You and Your Family Differ on Treatment Choices](#) [8]

## Additional Resources

[CancerCare: Caregiving](#) [9]

[Family Caregiver Alliance: Holding a Family Meeting](#) [10]

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## Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/caring-loved-one/sharing-responsibilities>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25031>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24634>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24699>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25299>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25112>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24740>

[9] <http://www.cancercare.org/tagged/caregiving>

[10] <https://caregiver.org/holding-family-meeting>