

CELEBRATE FAMILY CAREGIVERS

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November is National Family Caregiver Month, a time to recognize and thank the many hard working and devoted people who provide care to a loved one.

We all know a caregiver – the gentleman who patiently walks with his wife whose mobility is failing; the woman who gently nudges her forgetful husband to follow her back to the car after purchasing groceries; the woman who brings her aging mother to her doctor appointments; the man who brings his kids along to do some repairs on his parent’s house. They are everywhere – family, friends and neighbors who help their loved ones with the daily tasks of life, allowing them to maintain their independence, dignity and quality of life. The role of the unpaid caregiver is invaluable and yet they often don’t recognize their own worth.

Let’s Celebrate Caregivers this month! Here are some simple things you can do to really help a caregiver and let them know that they are important and appreciated.

1. Stop by their house and say hello. You don’t have to bring anything or do anything. Stopping for a quick visit to let them know you are thinking about them can mean a lot, especially if it is hard for them to get out of the house.
2. Call the caregiver and check in on how THEY are doing. Too often the conversation is about the person needing care and the caregivers’ needs are forgotten. Listen to them without judging or advising. An opportunity to share their feelings openly and in confidence can be a great help and comfort.
3. Offer to help. Instead of telling them to call if they need something, be more persistent in offering your help. Try this. “I am going to help you. Do you want me to bring a meal or a mop?” Or ask what they need from the grocery store or when is a good time to send your teenage son over to mow/rake/shovel snow. Be specific and gently insist on helping.
4. Invite them to do something – go for a walk, coffee, a movie. Maybe they have turned you down too many times, so you stopped asking. Try asking again and offer to help find someone to be with their loved one if that is a problem. Even if they say no, being asked will help them see they are still included.
5. Remind them of the importance of self-care, then help them seek out ways to get a break. Go with them to visit the ADRC of Clark County to find out the various types of support that are available.

6. Attend a support group meeting with them. Sometimes it is hard to go alone, and your presence will open up this valuable resource to them.

7. Check in regularly. A weekly phone call to ask how things are going can alleviate feelings of loneliness and help them feel special and important. Sometimes they just need someone to listen to them, and sometimes hearing about someone else's life gives them a break. If you are comfortable doing so, offer to care for their loved one for an hour or two so they can get a break.

Take some time to recognize and thank the family caregivers that you know. They deserve to be celebrated!