

What would you do? Results...

Last month we asked for your ideas on how to solve this situation: My 84-year old mother, who lives in another state, is starting to be very forgetful. I think a local family member should check on her but my sister wants to hire a service to do this. I don't have money for that plus I don't think my mother would let anyone she doesn't know in the house. What would you do?

We received over eighty responses! You sent in so many creative, practical and sensitive ideas. We can only reprint a handful here, but they represent the wide range of thoughtful solutions and approaches you suggested.

"Our parents deserve the utmost respect and help from their children. If it was my mother, I would definitely want a family member that is close by to check on her. I would also start thinking about having my mother come live with me."

"I don't have a lot of experience in this area yet, but if your mom is a long-time member of a church or other social organization, perhaps the group could have volunteers rotate visits to her home a couple of times a week. The volunteers may also be able to let you know when it's time to hire professional help. To your mother, this might look and feel more like a social event rather than strangers checking on her well-being."

"If a local family member was available and willing to do so, I would go that route first. Another option may be to bring her to live (not necessarily in same house) at a location where one of her children are located."

"This exact scenario happened in my family when my mother got Alzheimer's. My local brother took up the reins and checked on her every day, brought her dinner, etc. even though he had 3 kids and lots of family responsibilities. It's the right thing to do. If I had lived nearby, it would have fallen to me."

"First of all, I would have her evaluated by her physician to determine the cause of the forgetfulness... dementia, UTI or some other reason. If she is diagnosed with dementia, determine the degree of cognitive impairment and determine if any medications can slow the progression. I then would contact the local Area Agency on Aging, asking them to complete an assessment and determine if they have any services they could provide. I would want to ensure that it would still be safe for my mother to stay alone in her home. After all of this, I would sit down with my sister and mom discussing what the best plan would be to ensure mom's safety."

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“How would you want to be treated? Personally, I would rather have a family member. She took care of you your whole life, now it’s time to take care of her.”

“It depends on how ‘forgetful’ she is getting. If it’s just a matter of forgetting her medication occasionally, that can be divided out for weeks at a time. If it’s a matter of her leaving the oven on or things that can be unsafe, it may be time for someone to step in to help. If there are several family members to help your Mom, they could each take one day a week to stop by daily to check on her. If it would be only your sister checking on your Mom, this could get overwhelming for your sister. Does Mom have some financial resources to hire outside help? Maybe someone would only be needed 1/2 day for a few days weekly. If not, the next step would be for your Mom to move in with a family member or to go into an assisted living or other facility.”

“I would call the EAP to ask for help locating services to help.

“If no family member/neighbor wants to or is able to check on her, then I would look at my mother’s finances and see if she’s able to afford someone checking on her and ask if she would allow this. I would also look into agencies that may have telephone check in services or assessment/information services that could assist in educating me on what other resources would be helpful to my mother (such as an emergency alert system, etc.)”

“I think it’s time for a family get together to discuss Mom’s future. As much as we find it hard to accept when the time comes, the sacrifices have to be made. We all know Mom would do anything for us if she had to. Keeping Mom safe is the most important thing.”

“We would have a family meeting and see what would be the best thing to do. Depending on the agency your sister is looking at they can also take her on outings to make her feel and keep her independence.”

“This situation is one that I have had to deal with recently too. After considering all of the options, the best that worked for us was to hire a service. This was one we checked out and felt was reputable. We met the person and were there for the first visit to help with the transition with our mother. I think my mother enjoyed the company of someone new and we were able to be “on call” should anything happen. This gives the family caregivers some amount of freedom, but does require them to do frequent checking up, spontaneous visits when the service is there.”

““We are the sandwich generation: right in the middle of taking care of parents and our own children or grandchildren. All of your family members need to get together, along with your Mom, and sit down to discuss the best solution for everyone involved.”

Thank you to all who participated in our first “What would you do?” poll. Stay tuned for next month’s “What would you do?” and weigh in on another everyday issue.

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