

Sleepless in Seattle (& Manhattan Beach)



Q

Dear Adia,

I grew up in Manhattan Beach most of my life and after college, I moved with my husband and now 3 kids to Seattle. Although I miss the sunny days and beach life my home is in the Pacific Northwest. My father died 3 years ago and my siblings and I vowed to make sure we stayed close to mom and help support her quality of life. I continue to make the pilgrimage to my childhood home every 3 months to spend time with

mom and help my siblings manage her estate. Recently, after my last visit, I was shocked to see that the level and condition of her care had dropped considerably. One thing that I forgot to mention is that my older sister lives and works near mother and has been handling her day to day needs. My brother and I although still involved, have left her to manage things daily because of her willingness and close proximity. Often times my sister complains of lack of free time and sounds more and more stressed out. We feel guilty that she has inherited a brunt of “caregiving” needed to keep mom living at home comfortably. We have offered to work together as a team to create a solution but so far it feels we are on opposite sides of what is best for mom. One thing for sure Mom wants to stay home, and I feel she needs more care than my sister can provide. What can we do?

Sleepless in Seattle

A

Dear Sleepless in Seattle,

Caregiving is not easy for anyone, not for the caregiver and not for the care recipient. Additionally, caregiving is *not* everyone. Just because a person is a spouse or a son/daughter who lives close by doesn’t mean the person is the “best fit” for the job – caring for a parent. From a distance, it may be *especially harder* to feel that what you are doing is enough, or that what you are doing is important.

The first step to finding a solution to your caregiving dilemma is to **collect facts about the current needs of your mom and the tasks required to meet each need**. Write all the needs and tasks (“action items”) in 2 columns side by side on a yellow notepad. After talking with your siblings, decide who will be responsible for which tasks and include non-family members (i.e. hiring a professional caregiver) to leverage the tasks. Remember to ask yourself, “What is it going to take to get the job done!? Who is the *best* person for the task?” Think about your schedules and how to adapt the schedules to give respite to the primary caregiver, your sister. You may also consider, as long distance siblings, coming to town while your sister take a vacation.

Working as a “family team” requires that each member agree in advance how their strengths and skills can complement one another. Ideally, each of you will be able to take on tasks best suited to each person’s skills or interests. For example, who is available to help Mom go to the grocery store each week? Or perhaps, who can order the food online and have food delivered to the home, eliminating the task and time of driving to the grocery store? Be realistic about how much each person can do alone or share tasks on alternating weeks.

When thinking about your strengths, consider what you are particularly good at and how that skill might help in the current situation:

- Are you best on the phone, finding information, keeping people up-to-date?
- Are you good at supervising and leading others? Are you comfortable speaking with medical staff and interpreting what they say to others?
- Is your strongest suit paying bills, keeping track of bank statements, and reviewing insurance policies and reimbursement reports?

When thinking about your limits, consider:

- How often, both mentally and financially, can you afford to travel? What’s your budget?
- Are you emotionally prepared to take on what may *feel* like a reversal of roles?
- Can you be both calm and assertive when communicating from a distance?
- How will your decision to take on care responsibilities affect the rest of your family and your work?

Yours Truly,

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