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5 Mistakes to Avoid When Hiring a Caregiver for Your Parent

Finding an in-home caregiver for an aging parent can be a daunting task.

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You can't do it all, and when you realize that, you either hire someone else for the task or spread the work around. Or you just let it go.

But if part of doing it all is taking care of an aging parent, you can't let it go, and spreading the work among family and friends may be impractical or impossible. Depending on the type of care your parent needs, you may not be able to do much, even if you have the time. So if you're considering hiring an in-home caregiver for your mother, father or a relative, here are five common mistakes you should avoid.

Putting it off. Tamar Shovali, an assistant professor of human development at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida, who specializes in aging and caregiving, says the No. 1 mistake people make in this situation is not hiring a professional caregiver.

Shovali says there's a lot of evidence that shows using a professional caregiver – whether in home health care or adult day care – improves the psychological well-being of nonprofessional caregivers, like you. Indeed, studies in publications like the *Journal of Aging and Health* have found that people often seek professional caregivers to alleviate stress and depression that results from taking care of a loved one around the clock.

If you keep plugging away, taking care of a parent who needs more than you realistically give, you're risking depression, anxiety and resentment, Shovali says. She urges anyone with a parent or relative in failing health to look into the services that are available in their community. "The sooner you do your research, the better, because most caregivers regret not starting this process sooner," she says.

Not vetting the caregiver or agency. This process can be intimidating, especially if a friend or family member recommended a caregiver. But just because it worked out for someone you know doesn't mean it will for you.

"Don't be afraid to ask for the professional caregiver's credentials and prior experience," Shovali says. "You want to make sure that the agency has hired the professional caregiver themselves,

has conducted background checks, verified education and prior in-home care experience, and carries the proper insurance for workers' compensation claims."

Focusing on one factor to the exclusion of others. Maybe you're understandably panicking about the cost of in-home care. Or maybe you're wondering how your independent spitfire of a mother is going to take to someone coming into her home and cleaning or cooking.

"There are three kinds of elements to having in-home care – the financial piece, the skills that the caregiver brings and the personality of the caregiver," says Randy Brown, CEO of Quaker Gardens Senior Living, a nonprofit continuing care retirement community that offers in-home care in Stanton, California. "I think a mistake you can easily fall into is to only look at one of those elements and not equally weight all three. It's great if a caregiver has a wonderful personality and is honest, but if they have poor skills, that doesn't help your parent. Or if you focus so much on the financial side, you short yourself on the other two."

Not keeping everyone in the loop. If you've been taking care of your parents, and you have siblings who are too busy, lazy or unfocused to help, it'll probably fall to you to hire a professional caregiver. But once you find a contender for your parent's caregiving needs, ask your siblings to sit in on the interview process, which may help you avoid contentious issues later. For instance, you don't want a sibling to pop in someday for a visit and then complain about the caregiver because he or she didn't do any house cleaning. Maybe light housework was never part of the agreement.

"It's pretty common that the lead child, if you will, does all the work and has met with us and goes in with the right expectations, and then another sibling has a completely different expectation," Brown says.