Tips for Seniors Needing Assistance

Whoever is chosen for the level of assistance desired or required, it should be someone who is aware of how to properly provide for a senior’s needs. The senior should look for the following from the assistant or helper:

**Sufficient time.** As people age, it takes more time to process information and to get arthritic hands to work. When helpers are stressed or pressed for time, it can be frustrating to move at a slower pace. Be certain that both the senior’s and helper’s schedules allow sufficient time for the help that is needed.

**Prioritizing.** When work is begun, the helper should gather and go through all the paperwork and prioritize everything. If there isn’t sufficient time to complete everything all at once, and there rarely is, the least important items can wait until another time. It is extremely important that neither the senior nor the helper feel overwhelmed by the task at hand.

**Choices.** If given a choice, seniors will often let their helpers do more. Would the senior prefer to write the checks, or would it be better if the helper wrote the checks for the senior to sign? Always remember, the senior determines the level of involvement, so the helper should always ask before assuming any given duty.

**Visual Aids.** If a senior has poor eyesight, the lines on the check for the date, payee, dollar amount and signature can be traced in thick black ink. Large print checks can be purchased from banks and other check vendors. Large print check registers and check writing guides are also available. It is very important for seniors to retain their independence for as long as possible.

**Focus.** Many seniors love to tell stories. But it can be frustrating and a waste of time and money to be reviewing a stack of mail and end up listening to the same story for the seventeenth time. A helper should be able to gently and politely keep the senior on track.

**Participation.** When helpers are making telephone calls for the senior’s benefit, have the speaker turned on or use a second extension so the senior can hear and participate as well. Even simple tasks, such as putting stamps on envelopes, can help the less able stay involved.
**Explanations.** The senior should be told what is being done and what the mail brings, even reading letters out loud and reviewing bills and how much is owed. If necessary, the name of the payee and the amount can be said when writing checks. It can also help to write the date, payee name and amount on an index card or a piece of paper for bills being paid. This can be kept where it can be readily seen to save embarrassment for the senior of having to ask repeatedly for the same information.

**Information.** The senior should be shown bank statements. Time should be taken to point out the date, beginning and ending balances, and to answer any questions. If the senior is concerned about running out of money, the plan that is in place to care for assets should be explained, or the senior should be assisted in finding competent advisors to assist with putting such a plan in place.

**Respect.** Regardless of the senior’s level of competence, respect and dignity are paramount. Even if helpers do not agree with a senior’s decisions, it is important that they not criticize the senior. However, legitimate concerns can and certainly should be discussed. If abuse or exploitation is suspected or the concern is that the senior’s decision will negatively affect his wellbeing, then the helper has an obligation to intervene. Unsolicited opinions given to a competent senior adult sometimes can lead to arguments and a lack of trust. If there continues to be resistance, the helper should seek someone else whom the senior would trust to voice an opinion in the matter.