

## **Five tips on how to separate friendship and caregiver duties**

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It's not an uncommon situation to hear from an older adult that they are overwhelmed by caregiving. Caregiving for parents, spouses, young grandchildren, and even friends can quickly fill a retiree's calendar. Recently, I have heard more and more concerns from older adults that are feeling the pressure in providing care and support for a friend. As we age social circles can dwindle; spouses may pass away, and children/grandchildren scatter across the country so it is no surprise that many older friends rely on each other for support. Providing a ride to the doctor's office, dropping off a meal, delivering groceries and socializing can quickly turn into what my feel like a part-time job. While the relationship starts with friendship, in many cases it can become overwhelming and guilt-ridden for the more active and mobile friend. Here are some tips in working to balance being a friend and a caregiver:

### **1. Set boundaries**

- It is very important that you set boundaries with your friend. Determine if your friend's request is truly something only you can help with, or are there other friends, family or service providers that can help? Set very clear expectations with your friend on what you can and can't do for them and then stick to those expectations. If Thursday is the day of the week you spend with your grandchildren and your friend is asking for a ride to her dentist appointment, it's ok to say no and request another day that works best for you. You need to continue this with your friend and stay strong in holding to what you've discussed. New boundaries will likely need to be discussed and set as you and your needs will continue to change. Saying no does not mean you are not a good friend or that you don't care about your friend.

### **2. Refer to other social groups**

- a. Making new friends can be overwhelming no matter what your age. A "village"( Felician Village at Home), churches, senior centers, and non-profit groups are a great place to start. Even with current social distancing requirements there are small groups, virtual and even pen pal programs being operated.

### **3. Be honest**

- a. Don't be afraid to tell your friend how you are truly feeling. You may want to start the conversation with how much you care about them and want to be certain they are being taking care of, but that you also have a responsibility to care for yourself. Talk through the situation together and see if there is any way to lighten the load for both of you by using services within the community for things like grocery delivery, taking out the trash, meal delivery or preparation, cleaning services, etc.

### **4. Take time for yourself**

- a. Set time on your calendar each week that is simply for you. Prior to retirement you may have wondered how you could possibly fill all of your open days, but now you may feel like there's no time for you. Enjoy a cup of coffee, read a book, go on a walk or meditate and pray. Whatever it is that you enjoy, put your phone away, don't answer the door and enjoy your alone time.

## **5. Remember to laugh and enjoy each other**

- a. There's a reason why you became friends to begin with – do not forget that! It is important that you also set aside time on your calendar with your friend...to be a friend. There should be no grocery shopping, meal prepping, laundry, cleaning or paperwork during this time. Sit and enjoy each other's company doing whatever the two of you love best.

There may be other reasons your friend is asking you for more as time progresses. If you suspect vulnerabilities due to medication issues, anxiety or depression, hearing problems or memory issues, it is important you reach out directly to your friend's family. In the event no family is available, a call to the Aging and Disability Resource Center or Health and Human Services will help guide you on what resources might make the most sense.

Felician Village at Home is a membership organization supporting older adults and their desire to live healthy and connected independent lives as they grow older. Through social connection, educational opportunities, volunteer assistance and more we can help provide peace of mind for our members, their families and friends. Felician Village at Home was developed with the national village concept in mind of members helping members to encourage older adults in our community to be proactive about their aging journeys.