

## How to Make Tough Decisions

If you care for a person with dementia, you will be faced with difficult and often lonely decisions such as, Should I get help at home or in a day-center? Should I stop her driving or start to take care of the finances? Should I consider placement in a care home? Should I insist on health and safety measures? The decisions are tough when there is little money, few good options, no time, and hardest of all, when your family member refuses to co-operate. Here are some tips for making tough decision:

- **Ask: is it my decision to make?** If she is mentally competent or has a caregiver such as a spouse, you may still feel responsible but have little real power to decide.
- **Dare to think the unthinkable.** When change seems to be impossible, ask yourself, “What would happen if my health broke down?” In that case change would be forced upon you, or you would have to decide in a crisis. So look at options while you still have control.
- **Listen to those who care about you.** If they are telling you that you need help, take them very seriously. The question arises from if you need to change to how to start.
- **Decide when to start.** If you consider what the situation is likely to be in 6 months’ time and you get that sinking feeling, the time to start change is definitely now!
- **Choose one issue.** From your list of health and safety measures, personal care, social needs, or respite for yourself, choose one that will leverage other benefits. Many caregivers are paralyzed by the magnitude of their task.
- **Experiment.** You don’t know whether a care option will work out until you try it. So experiment until you find a good fit. You can always back out. The key is to act!
- **Take small steps, one at a time.** It is easier for one with dementia to agree to a short visit to a day center and then return another day, than to buy into a whole program.
- **Call in the allies.** If your loved one resists, ask for some help from someone with whom she is more co-operative. Consider a family meeting to decide strategies and roles. And remember, if you have money you have been saving for a rainy day, THIS IS IT!
- **Make a friend of crisis.** When action is not possible, you may have to wait for a crisis to happen; but meanwhile prepare for the inevitable by making a Plan B. check out services and facilities now.
- **Talk with a professional.** Call the Information Helpline (1-800-232-0851) for help in making a plan. Talking with an expert can help clarify your own thinking.
- **Remember, care decisions involve choices among imperfect options** If you focus on what seems best for your loved one and use the resources available, rest assured that you have done your duty.