

# How Do Family Members Share Tasks?



Since families provide the majority of care needed elders, it is informative to look at caregiver styles and factors that affect caregiving participation. A Case Western Reserve University study identified five different caregiver styles:

**Routine Caregivers** incorporate regular assistance into their daily activities. For example: regularly doing a parent's weekly shopping, laundry, or house cleaning.

**Backup Caregivers** are reliably available to provide assistance on request, but don't voluntarily initiate involvement.

**Circumscribed Caregivers** provide help within carefully defined limits that other siblings recognize and respect. For example, calling a parent regularly once a week, but not being available for other help.

**Sporadic Caregivers** provide assistance at their own convenience. For example: taking a parent along on an occasional outing.

**Dissociated Caregivers** cannot be reliably counted on to provide assistance of any kind and may not even be involved in family discussions of the situation.

Daughters, oldest children, parental favorites, and "reliable" children are more likely to assume the routine caregiving style. Often two siblings in a family are routine caregivers. Sons are more likely than daughters to be circumscribed, sporadic, or dissociated caregivers.

Another observation from this study was that conflict did not prevent siblings from cooperating on caregiving tasks in families with only two adult children. But in families with more siblings, conflict resulted in one becoming dissociated from the caregiving system.

The personality that an adult child was assigned within the family (for instance, "She's the reliable one") affected the expectations others had of that person's participation. Being employed tended to affect when an adult child helped a parent, but did not decrease the likelihood of routine caregiving.

Family caregiving happens in many different ways. Each family member has his or her own set of abilities and level of willingness. Recognizing each other's caregiving styles may help you build on your collective strengths to get the job done.