

# Choosing a Caregiver

*A guide for individuals and families with special needs*

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## Choosing a Caregiver

Just as all of us need help from time to time, so do people with disabilities and their families. Some people with disabilities require different levels of assistance in completing everyday tasks. To perform these tasks, it may be necessary to hire a caregiver - an assistant for difficult activities such as bathing or dressing. A caregiver can perform an array of duties or simply "stand in" on a regular basis.

Choosing a person to care for yourself or your family member with a disability can be a difficult, but rewarding, process. Who should be trusted? Certainly not just anyone. There are many factors to consider, such as whether the applicant is qualified and experienced and, if not, whether he or she is capable of being trained. Is the potential caregiver aware of the challenges and responsibilities involved in caring for a person with a disability? Would he or she enjoy this type of work?

As you begin the process of choosing a caregiver, it may be helpful to compile a list of the skills, qualities and attributes you are seeking in a candidate. Five such important characteristics can be summarized as "The Five C's":

- Competence
- Caring
- Compatibility
- Cooperation
- Communication

This booklet provides tips, suggestions and checklists to help you select a caregiver.

## Tips for Consumers and Families

When selecting a caregiver for yourself or your family member, you should approach the interview as a time for honest dialogue. Ask open-ended questions that will prompt more than a simple "yes or no response. Ask the potential caregiver how he or she would respond in a particular situation, then ask for previous, real-life examples of problem-solving. Such questions will help you assess the applicant's competence in caring for a person with special needs.

Following are some additional tips to keep in mind when choosing a caregiver:

- Interview a new caregiver in person at your home. If you and the caregiver agree to proceed with an employment agreement, provide sufficient orientation several days before the date, so the caregiver can become acquainted with you or your family member.
- Look for a caregiver who communicates well. Caregivers should be good listeners and should be able to repeat instructions back to you.
- Give the caregiver the opportunity to speak up and be candid. Relaxed, two-way conversation will help you determine if the caregiver is able to assume the various duties required.
- Make sure the caregiver is compatible with you or your family member, so time together can be enjoyable. Discuss with the caregiver some appropriate actions to common situations that will arise.
- Help the caregiver understand how to communicate with you or your family member. Stress the importance of both verbal and nonverbal responses.
- Make sure the caregiver is familiar with special medical or adaptive equipment that may be used.
- Practice any emergency procedures that may be necessary for your safety or your family member's safety.
- Provide specific written instructions on how to seek medical care and other emergency assistance.
- Describe and familiarize the caregiver with any dangerous or unusual symptoms associated with your disability or your family member's disability.
- Get references or have a background check conducted on the caregiver you decide to hire.

## An Interview Checklist

- **Does the caregiver:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Seem friendly and mature?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Make you feel at ease and seem at ease himself/herself?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seem to be in good health and physically able to perform required duties?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seem gentle and willing to follow instructions? Have a sense of humor?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seem to be alert and interested?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Demonstrate an ability to follow spoken and written directions?  
Demonstrate appropriate social behavior, including self-control?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have past experience in assisting and/or caring for people with special needs?

- **Will the caregiver:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Respect your special needs or your family member's special needs?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have reasonable expectations of what you or your family member can do independently and without assistance?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Talk freely with you and your family member, and assist with communication if necessary?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Understand the primary responsibility is to provide care and/or assistance for you or your family member?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Provide medical documentation that he/she is free of communicable diseases?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ensure he/she is physically able to be responsible for you or your family member?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ensure he/she has no history of abuse or neglect as indicated by professional references and background check?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Provide proof of a valid driver's license, if expected to transport you or your family member?

- **Does your home have the following health and safety precautions? Discuss their location and use with the caregiver:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ A smoke detector in a hallway or central area? A fuse box that is labeled appropriately?

- \_\_\_\_\_ A battery-operated flashlight that is easy to find?
- \_\_\_\_\_ A fire extinguisher in the kitchen?
- \_\_\_\_\_ A standard first-aid kit?
- \_\_\_\_\_ A working telephone(s)?
- \_\_\_\_\_ A list of emergency telephone numbers - including emergency medical service/ambulance and poison control? Is there a list by each telephone?
- \_\_\_\_\_ A list of other emergency, medical or evacuation procedures?

## Hiring and Firing

Sometimes, even after you have carefully chosen a caregiver, there may come a time when you must dismiss that person and seek a replacement.

Abuse and neglect, of course, should never be tolerated. But neither should you tolerate chronic tardiness, absenteeism or failure to perform assigned duties. You may wish to establish a set of rules, guidelines and job requirements and discuss these with the applicant before coming to an employment agreement. If you and the caregiver communicate clearly from the outset, a dismissal should it ever become necessary - will be less difficult for all parties involved.

It also is a good idea to:

- Make it clear during the interview that you can fire, as well as hire.
- Agree on how much notice you or your caregiver should give to end your employment contract or arrangement.
- Tell the caregiver exactly what duties you expect to be performed, and how they should be carried out. Be specific.
- Make sure the caregiver understands what behavior is unacceptable tardiness, not performing job duties, poor attitude, discussing personal problems, borrowing money, etc.
- Tell the caregiver the number of hours to be worked, the time to report to work and the time to leave work. Agree on times and frequency of breaks.
- If you expect the caregiver to work on weekends, holidays, at night or other special times, say so. To establish a beneficial arrangement, you or your family and the caregiver must agree on the ground rules.
- If possible, draw up and sign a specific employment contract.

## Special Considerations

It is important to bear in mind that while your needs or your family member's needs may be readily apparent to you, a new caregiver will not be aware of your situation unless you communicate with him or her. Also, it is a good idea to discuss the rules and values you have worked hard to establish in your home, and explain their importance with the caregiver. Ideally, the relationship between you and your caregiver should be one of mutual respect and understanding.

Following are some considerations you may want to discuss with the caregiver:

- **Will the caregiver:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Teach good health habits?

\_\_\_\_\_ Teach your family member to respect others' rights and property?

\_\_\_\_\_ Meet your family member's special needs?

\_\_\_\_\_ Help your family member learn to be as independent as possible?

- **Will the caregiver:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Provide a consistent schedule?

\_\_\_\_\_ Use language, grammar and social behavior that is appropriate?

\_\_\_\_\_ Respect others' rights, property and confidentiality?

\_\_\_\_\_ Respect and reinforce your family's rules and values?

\_\_\_\_\_ Have training in caring for or assisting a person with special needs?

**Other things to discuss:**

- Are there other precautions or procedures?
- Do others help out? If yes, how and when?
- How will your family member be cared for if he/she is sick? What steps should the caregiver take if your family member becomes sick?
- If the caregiver becomes sick, what should he/she do? What type of notice will be required?
- Will the caregiver take trips away from home with your family member? Will you be notified and asked to okay them?
- Does your family member have any particularly noteworthy behaviors? How should the caregiver react? (see Appendix [H](#)).

- What kind of recreational and leisure activities do you or your family member enjoy? (see Appendices [I](#), [J](#)).
- Is your family member restricted from using the telephone, television, radio, microwave, etc.?

## Safety Tips for Caregivers

When caring for a person with a disability, try to maintain the same kind of safe, healthy environment you would in your own home. Also, keep in mind that some people with disabilities need special protection from potential hazards in the home.

When on the job, keep these tips in mind:

- Wipe up spills and remove broken glass immediately.
- When traveling, always buckle up, no matter how short the distance. Make sure infants ride in approved car seats.
- Keep plastic wrappings out of reach.
- Make sure gun cabinets are always locked. Weapons and ammunition should be stored and secured separately.
- Store household cleansers, medicine, paint and paint thinner, detergents and bleaches, and lawn chemicals in clearly marked containers and keep them in locked storage areas. Keep keys hidden, and return keys to a safe place immediately after use.
- Tell the family if an appliance or household furnishing is broken so that it can be repaired or discarded.
- Keep stairways and floors free from toys and other items.
- Learn to safely operate equipment, such as van lifts.

### **Other things to discuss with your employer:**

- Learn what you should do in case of accident, illness, fire, bad weather or other emergency.
- Learn the family's escape plan in case of fire. Does the fire department know that a person with a disability lives at the address? (See Appendix [A.](#))
- Learn how and which medications to administer. (See Appendix [B.](#))
- Learn about seizures or other unusual medical conditions. Learn what to do if a seizure, fainting or spasticity occurs. (See Appendix [C.](#))
- Learn about special eating needs, food preferences or allergies. (See Appendix [D.](#))

- Become familiar with and know how to use special adaptive equipment. (See Appendix [E](#).)
- Learn the typical daily schedule the family expects you to keep. (See Appendix [F](#).)
- Make sure you learn how to perform your duties. Know what degree of assistance will be needed in various situations. (See Appendix [G](#).)

## Emergency Plan of Action

No matter how many precautions you take, a situation may arise when you must call for help. Emergency preparedness is one of the most crucial aspects of caring for a person with a disability. Knowing in advance how you will respond to a home fire or accident, natural disaster or medical emergency will save time and maybe a life.

If an emergency arises, follow this plan of action:

- In case of emergency, tend to the immediate needs and well-being of the individual.
- Notify the family/guardian or other contact person as soon as possible after an emergency.
- Also, notify the service coordinator as soon as possible after an emergency.
- **If an emergency or natural disaster occurs, my family/guardian or other contact person can be reached at:**

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# Appendices

The following worksheets address issues that you may encounter when choosing a caregiver.

- A. Basic Information for Caregivers
- B. Medications/Medical Information
- C. Seizures, Spasticity or Specific Behaviors
- D. Allergies/Diet
- E. Adaptive Equipment, Aids and Devices
- F. Daily Routine
- G. Daily Living Skills
- H. Your Child's Behavior (for families of children with special needs)
- I. Recreation (for families of children with special needs)
- J. Recreation and Leisure (for adults with special needs)

Appendix A

## Basic Information for Caregivers

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_ Social Security  
Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Parent/Friend: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Another Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Service Coordinator and Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work/School/Day Program: \_\_\_\_\_

Address/Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Emergency Phone Numbers

Primary Physician: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Health Insurance Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Policy Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Hospital Preferred: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Ambulance Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Police/Sheriff Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fire Department Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Dentist's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Dental Insurance Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Policy Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Neighbors and Phone Numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Pastor or Church: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B

## Medications/Medical Information

**I authorize administering the following prescription and non-prescription medications:**

1. Name of Medication: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Dosage and time given: \_\_\_\_\_

How given: \_\_\_\_\_

Side effects: \_\_\_\_\_

Prescribed by Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name of Medication: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Dosage and time given: \_\_\_\_\_

How given: \_\_\_\_\_

Side effects: \_\_\_\_\_

Prescribed by Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Name of Medication: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Dosage and time given: \_\_\_\_\_

How given: \_\_\_\_\_

Side effects: \_\_\_\_\_

Prescribed by Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Name of Medication: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose: \_\_\_\_\_

Dosage and time given: \_\_\_\_\_

How given: \_\_\_\_\_

Side effects: \_\_\_\_\_

Prescribed by Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

To be given to \_\_\_\_\_ (family member's name)

by \_\_\_\_\_ (caregiver)

\_\_\_\_\_ (your signature)

\_\_\_\_\_ (date)

## Appendix C

# Seizures, Spasticity or Specific Behaviors

- Should the caregiver expect seizures, spasticity or specific behaviors? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, describe in detail: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How long does a seizure, spasticity or specific behavior usually last? \_\_\_\_\_
- What happens before a seizure, spasticity or specific behavior? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What happens after a seizure, spasticity or specific behavior? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What should a caregiver do during a seizure, spasticity or specific behavior?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How should the seizure, spasticity or specific behavior be recorded? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Who should be contacted afterwards? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix D

## Allergies/Diet

- Are there allergies? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, please list: \_\_\_\_\_
- Is there a specific diet? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are there foods that should not be eaten? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Which foods are preferred? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Which foods are not preferred? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What level of meal/food preparation will the care giver be expected to perform?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

# Adaptive Equipment, Aids and Devices

- Are special adaptive equipment aids and devices needed? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Where is the equipment kept? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How is the equipment used? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How long should the equipment be used? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- At what times should the equipment be used? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How will I know if the equipment is being used properly? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What type of maintenance will the caregiver be expected to perform on adaptive equipment, aids or devices? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

# Daily Routine

Please describe how a typical day is spent:

	<b>Weekday</b>	<b>Weekend</b>
6 to 7 a.m.		
7 to 8 a.m.		
8 to 9 a.m.		
9 to 10 a.m.		
10 to 11 a.m.		
11 a.m. to Noon		
Noon to 1 p.m.		
1 to 2 p.m.		
2 to 3 p.m.		
3 to 4 p.m.		
4 to 5 p.m.		

5 to 6 p.m.		
6 to 7 p.m.		
7 to 8 p.m.		
8 to 9 p.m.		
9 to 10 p.m.		
10 to 11 p.m.		
11 p.m. to Midnight		

## Appendix G

# Daily Living Skills

Specify type and degree of assistance needed in each area:

Following are some considerations you may want to discuss with the caregiver:

- Eating: Right-handed \_\_\_\_\_ Left-handed \_\_\_\_\_  
Be alert to swallowing problems or choking.  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Bathing: Prefers Tub: \_\_\_\_\_ Shower: \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
Always check water temperature. If assistance with bathing is needed, never leave a family member unattended in the tub.

Specify usual frequency and time for baths and shampoo:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- Dressing: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Toilet and related hygiene: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Grooming (hair, care of teeth, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Bedtime: Make sure your family member is resting in a comfortable and safe position.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Communication skills: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - Ambulation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

● Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix H  
**Your Child's Behavior**

(for families of children with special needs)

- How should the caregiver recognize good behavior? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- What methods of discipline, if any should be used when your child misbehaves?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- Describe any behavior problems such as hitting, screaming, refusing to follow directions, self-abuse, etc.:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix I  
**Recreation**

(for families of children with special needs)

- List toys your child likes to play with: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What activities does your child enjoy? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What activities does your child dislike? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Are there objects/activities that frighten your child? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Does your child enjoy playing with other children? Who are favored playmates?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Where are toys/games/recreational items located? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other comments/suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix j  
**Recreation and Leisure**

(for adults with special needs)

- List recreational or leisure activities you enjoy: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Are facilities for recreational or leisure activities located nearby? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Will the caregiver provide or assist with transportation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Who will pay for the caregiver to participate in the activity? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Will the caregiver attend leisure activities on his/her day off? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other comments/suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Helpful Publications

The SC Department of Disabilities and Special Needs offers the following publications free of charge for people with disabilities and their families. For copies or for more information, call:

The SC Department of Disabilities and Special Needs  
Office of Community Education  
(803) 898-9692  
V/TTY (803) 898-9600  
1 -888-DSN-INFO  
FAX (803) 898-9653

### 1990-1995: Five Years of Progress

- provides an overview of the agency's progress, including disability prevention activities, enhanced family support systems, improved services, the development of local support organizations, availability of financial resources and recent legislation.

### Child Care and Development Block Grant Facts

- general information and eligibility criteria for the Child Care and Development Block Grant program.

### Claims and Coverage

- brochure about health insurance for families of people with mental retardation.

### Consumer/Family Organization Manual

- guide to assist with the role, functions, development and organization of local consumer / family organizations.

### Family Matters

- guide for brothers and sisters of people with disabilities and special needs that provides suggestions for helping them face unique concerns and challenges.

### Head Injury: A Family Guide

- helps families adjust to living with a family member who has survived a brain injury. In addition to addressing relevant legal, social and vocational issues, the booklet advises families ways to create a new family life-style and ways to manage emotions and behaviors of the person with a brain injury.

### Making Life Work After Head Injury

- includes medical information about brain injuries and what may be expected during the rehabilitation process. It also offers suggestions to help a person with a brain injury become reacquainted and active with family and community.

### Medicaid Program Overview

- provides general information about the Medicaid program which provides medical care for people with low income.

### Practical Guide to Services

- a catalog of detailed information about services, support organizations, advocacy groups and agencies that serve people with disabilities.

### Stork Service

- special support packet of printed materials for families of newborns with Down syndrome.

### Tax Bulletin for Families of People with Disabilities and Special Needs

- general information about deductions and credits available to families of people with disabilities and special needs when filing state and federal taxes.

### Working with Families Who Have Special Needs: A Guide for Professionals

- a guide to help professionals work more effectively with families of children with special needs. The guide outlines DDSN professional principles and philosophy, and includes responsibilities for providing family-centered services.

### Working with Professionals: A Guide for Families with Special Needs

- assists families in working more effectively with professionals who provide services for children

with disabilities.