

## **LONG DISTANCE CAREGIVING: TIPS FOR THE CHECK-IN CALL**

You live in New York City; your mom lives in Florida. You talk regularly. But, after each phone conversation, you wonder: How do I really know that all is okay? Sometimes, caring conversations can be about the big issues (money, moving, a change in care needs) and sometimes it's about the little things, like how the day goes for your caree who lives a distance away. Caring conversations about the little things can help you understand when the bigger concerns (like when they need more help) need addressing.

During your conversations, ask questions to get a better understanding of your caree's day. It's not about peppering your caree with questions; it's about inserting good questions during your comfortable conversations.

**Questions like these can help you gauge how well your caree manages:**

- 1. What's for dinner tonight? (So you know she's eating okay.)**
- 2. Where did you go yesterday? (So you know she's getting out of the house.)**
- 3. How do you organize your schedule so you take your medications on time? (So you know she's taking her medications on time.)**
- 4. Who will you see today? (So you know she's socializing and engaging with others.)**
- 5. What's the best part of your day? (So you know she has meaning in her day.)**
- 6. What's new in the neighborhood? (So you know she's aware and involved of her surroundings.)**
- 7. Who's called this week? (So you have an idea of who regularly contacts her.)**
- 8. What can I do for you? (Asking might free your caree up to telling.)**
- 9. What have you been watching on TV? (Another way to understand how she spends her day.)**
- 10. What's the gossip you're hearing lately? (Again, a way to understand how well she's engaged with others. You also will understand how her peers are doing and what captures her attention.)**

Specific questions help you better understand your caree's situation. A general question, like "How are you feeling?" might be met with a general answer, "I'm doing fine," which really doesn't tell you much. Questions about what your caree eats and how often she goes grocery shopping help you understand how well she's managing. And, when she begins to struggle ("I haven't been able to get out shopping this week") you can ask more questions to better understand the situation. Perhaps she didn't need groceries this week. Perhaps the trips to the grocery stores are beginning to wear her out.

When you understand what's going well, you can keep those things going well. When something starts to slip, you can begin to discuss alternatives. For instance, if the grocery shopping seems to be getting too hard, you can say, "Grocery shopping can be taxing. Let's look at options for having your groceries delivered."

I now live with my parents. A few years ago, though, I lived close to my parents, except when we had snow in Chicago. The few miles seemed like two hundred miles. When I knew the forecast called for snow, I called my parents the day before the expected snowfall and asked, "What's our game plan for the snow?"

A game plan meant I could plan my day to be available to shovel and my dad knew he could count on me to lend a hand. The game plan evolved to include a solution created by my dad: When the snow fall measured more than two inches, my dad would use a local handyman to plow his long driveway. These plans made the winter much easier for all of us. And, it all started with a phone call.