



IDEAL CAREGIVERS 4U | OCTOBER FAMILY GUIDE

Around the Table

Noticing Changes and Starting the Care Conversation

A practical guide for families visiting an aging parent or loved one this Thanksgiving, with printable tools for the conversations that follow.



RESPECT > INTEGRITY > COMPASSION

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BEFORE YOU VISIT

A Note From Our Founder

Thanksgiving brings families home. The table fills up. The stories come out. Sometimes, somewhere between the turkey and the pie, you notice something. Maybe Dad's fridge is nearly empty. Maybe Mom asks the same question twice. Maybe the house just doesn't feel the way it used to.

That quiet worry is more common than you think. It's also a sign of love. It means you're paying attention. I've spent more than 25 years helping families through this exact moment. Here's what I've learned. The families who do best aren't the ones with all the answers. They're the ones who start talking early, gently, and together.

This guide is here to help you do that. Read it before your visit. Use the tools included here afterward. If you'd like a hand, we're only a phone call away.

Warmly,

Nancy Dahdah

Founder, Ideal Caregivers 4u

What's Inside

	Section	What it helps you do
1	What to Watch For	Spot the small changes that phone calls hide
2	Starting the Conversation	Raise concerns without it feeling like an ambush
3	Keeping Them in the Driver's Seat	Protect your loved one's dignity and choices
4	Getting Everyone on the Same Page	Share the load with siblings and family
5	Understanding Your Options	See the full range of support, not just two extremes
6	Making a First Plan Together	Turn worry into a few clear next steps
Tools	Printable Family Toolkit	Observation checklist, conversation starters, and a family meeting agenda

SECTION 1

What to Watch For During Holiday Visits



Why It Matters

Phone calls hide a lot. "I'm fine" is easy to say over the phone. In person, the small details speak up.

Changes in older adults often happen slowly. The person living with them may not notice at all.

A visit gives you fresh eyes.

Catching changes early also keeps more doors open. The **Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI)** found that about 1 in 9 people newly admitted to long-term care in 2018–2019 could potentially have stayed at home with the right supports. Early noticing leads to earlier help. Earlier help often means more choices.

What Families Can Do

Look around the home

The home tells a story. Check the fridge for expired food. Notice piles of unopened mail or unpaid bills. Look for dead plants, laundry piling up, or new dents on the car. Peek at medication bottles. Are they full when they should be half empty?

Watch the person gently

Notice weight loss or gain. Look at grooming and clothing. Watch how they get up from a chair or manage stairs. Pay attention to hearing, memory, and mood. Are they quieter than usual? More easily frustrated?

Listen to the stories

Some of the best clues come up in passing. "I don't drive at night anymore." "I stopped going to cards." "I haven't seen Marg in ages." Shrinking routines and friendships can signal bigger changes.

Area	What you might notice	Why it's worth a second look
Food	Empty or expired fridge, weight loss, simple meals only	Nutrition affects energy, strength, and healing
Medications	Missed doses, confusion about pills, full bottles	Mistakes can lead to falls or hospital visits
Home	Clutter, unpaid bills, stale smells, unwashed dishes	Daily tasks may be getting harder to manage
Mobility	Holding furniture to walk, new bruises, avoiding stairs	These are common early fall-risk signs
Memory	Repeated questions, missed appointments, lost items	Worth mentioning to their doctor
Mood	Withdrawal, less interest in hobbies, low energy	Loneliness and low mood affect overall health

A gentle reminder

Write down what you see. Don't diagnose it. One-off day means little. A pattern means more.

Use the **Holiday Visit Observation Checklist** at the back of this guide.

How Professional Support Helps

Families often feel awkward poking around a parent's home. A professional can do it without the emotional weight.

Our **Senior Home Safety Specialists** complete a 250-point home safety assessment. Our nurses offer **wellness check-ins** that look at health, medications, and daily function. Both give your family a clear, objective picture. They also catch things loving eyes can miss.

SECTION 2

Starting the Conversation Without the Ambush

Why It Matters

How you start matters as much as what you say. Raising concerns at a full dinner table rarely goes well. People dig in when they feel cornered or embarrassed.

The goal of a first conversation isn't a decision. It's an opening. You're planting a seed, not closing a deal.

Most older adults already know something is changing. Many are scared to say it out loud. A calm, private talk can feel like relief.



What Families Can Do

Pick your moment

Choose a quiet one-on-one time. A walk, a drive, or coffee the morning after works well. Avoid the big meal, late evenings, or moments when anyone is tired or rushed.

Lead with love and curiosity

Start with how you feel, not what they're doing wrong. Ask open questions. "How are you finding things around the house lately?" invites a real answer. "You can't manage anymore" shuts it down.

Listen more than you talk

Expect "I'm fine" the first time. That's normal. Thank them for talking. Let them know you'll check in again. Many families need two or three conversations before anything shifts.

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Try saying...	Instead of...
"I've noticed the stairs seem harder. How do they feel to you?"	"You're going to fall down those stairs."
"I worry about you. Can we talk about what would make things easier?"	"You need help. It's time."
"What would help you keep doing the things you love?"	"You can't live like this anymore."
"Would you be open to trying a little help, just to see?"	"We've already arranged someone."
"What worries you most about getting older?"	"We need to talk about moving you."

If it doesn't go well

Stay calm. Don't push. Say something like, "Okay. I love you. Let's pick this up another time." Leaving the door open is a win.

Find more starter lines in the **Conversation Starters** tool at the back.

How Professional Support Helps

Sometimes a parent hears things more easily from someone outside the family. There's no history, no role reversal, and no feeling of being "parented" by their kids.

Our **Senior Living Advisor** service is free. An advisor can talk with your loved one directly, answer questions honestly, and explain options without pressure. It often takes the heat out of the conversation.

SECTION 3

Keeping Your Loved One in the Driver's Seat



Why It Matters

Resistance to help usually isn't stubbornness. It's fear. Fear of losing their home, their privacy, or their say. People accept help they choose far more readily than help chosen for them. Dignity isn't a nice extra. It's the foundation of good care.

Capable adults also have the right to make their own decisions. That includes choices their family might not make. Your role is to support, inform, and stay close.

What Families Can Do

Ask what matters most to them

Before talking about problems, talk about goals. Do they want to stay in the house? Keep gardening? Cook Sunday dinner? Stay in their church or club? Build every next step around those answers.

Offer choices, not ultimatums

"Would mornings or afternoons work better for a helper?" gives them control. So does letting them meet a caregiver before deciding. Small choices add up to a strong sense of ownership.

Plan the paperwork while they can lead it

Legal documents like powers of attorney let your loved one choose who speaks for them if they ever can't. The names and rules vary by province. A lawyer can walk them through it. Doing it now keeps the decision in their hands.

A note from the other side of the table

"I know you worry. I worry too, sometimes. But please remember, this is still my life.

Ask me before you decide. Let me try things my way first. If I need help, let me help choose it.

I don't want to be managed. I want to be included. That's all."

How Professional Support Helps

Good in-home care fits around the person, not the other way around. At Ideal Caregivers 4u, care plans start with your loved one's routines, preferences, and goals.

We aim for consistent caregivers, so trust can grow. Our **companionship care** often feels less like "help" and more like a friend who stops by. That framing makes it much easier to say yes.

SECTION 4

Getting Everyone on the Same Page

Why It Matters

Siblings rarely see the same parent. The one who lives nearby sees the daily struggles. The one who flies in sees a parent on their best behaviour. That gap can cause real friction.

The load is also rarely shared evenly. CIHI reports that 96% of people receiving long-term home care had an unpaid caregiver. More than 1 in 3 of those caregivers reported distress. When one person carries everything, burnout follows.

Holidays are a rare chance to get everyone together. Use it.



What Families Can Do

Compare notes first

Before any big talk with your parent, talk with each other. Share what each of you has noticed. A quick call or group chat helps everyone start from the same facts.

Divide by strengths, not guilt

One sibling might be great with money. Another might be good at appointments. Someone else might simply be the best at phone calls. Match tasks to people.

Give long-distance family a real role

Distance doesn't mean doing nothing. Long-distance family can manage bills online, research options, book appointments, or schedule regular video calls. They can also fly in to give the local caregiver a break.

Role	A good fit for...	Examples
The Coordinator	Someone organized and nearby	Tracks appointments, keeps the family updated
The Money Manager	Someone comfortable with numbers	Bills, benefits, insurance, budgeting for care
The Researcher	Anyone, including long-distance family	Looks into services, programs, and costs
The Connector	Someone warm and chatty	Regular calls, visits, and outings
The Relief	Family who live farther away	Plans visits to give the main caregiver a break

How Professional Support Helps

Professional care gives the family one reliable point of contact. It also takes pressure off the sibling who's been doing it all.

With Ideal Caregivers 4u, families get regular updates and a care team that can answer questions. That keeps everyone informed, wherever they live. It also turns family visits back into family time.

SECTION 5

Understanding Your Options



Why It Matters

Many families think there are only two choices. Either Mom stays home alone, or she moves into a home. That belief makes every conversation feel scary.

In reality, there's a wide middle ground. Support can be a few hours a week. It can grow as needs change. Knowing this takes a lot of fear out of the room.

What Families Can Do

Learn what public care offers

Publicly funded home care is available across Canada. In Ontario, it's coordinated through **Ontario Health atHome**. In Alberta, families can start by calling Health Link at 811. Public care is valuable, but hours can be limited and wait times vary.

Know how private care fits in

Private in-home care can fill the gaps. It can add hours, offer more flexible scheduling, or provide companionship that public programs don't cover. Many families use both together.

Match support to the need, not the fear

You don't have to plan for the worst on day one. Start with what's needed now. A few visits a week for meals and company may be all it takes at first.

Level of support	Best for...	What it can include
We Help Silver: Companionship & Independent Living	Mostly independent seniors who could use company and a hand	Conversations, outings, light housekeeping, meal preparation, errands, reminders
We Assist Gold: Personal Care & Daily Living	Seniors who need hands-on help with daily routines	Bathing, dressing, grooming, mobility support, plus everything in “We Help”
We Manage Platinum: Complete Care & Nursing Support	Seniors with more complex health needs	Care management, clinical nursing support, plus everything in “We Assist”

Specialized services, when you need them

- Dementia & Alzheimer's companionship care
- 24-hour and awake overnight care
- Hospital discharge support
- Healthy cooking&meal planning
- End-of-life care
- Veteran-approved care with direct billing

How Professional Support Helps

A good provider helps you sort through the options instead of selling you the biggest package. Our free **Senior Living Advisor** can explain public and private choices side by side.

We build flexible schedules that can grow or shrink. We can also work alongside publicly funded services. You get the support that fits, and nothing you don't need.

SECTION 6

Making a First Plan Together

Why It Matters

Worry without a plan just grows. A plan, even a small one, turns it into action.

The Government of Canada's aging-in-place planning guide makes a simple point. Planning ahead can help people avoid rushed decisions during a crisis. A fall or hospital stay is a hard time to make big choices.

Your first plan doesn't need to be perfect. It just needs to exist. You can adjust it as you go.



What Families Can Do

Hold a family meeting

Include your loved one whenever possible. Keep it short and focused. Use the **Family Meeting Agenda** at the back to stay on track.

Start with one or two changes

Pick the concern that matters most. Maybe it's meals. Maybe it's loneliness. Maybe it's the stairs. Solve that first. Early wins build trust for the next step.

Set a check-in date

Agree to talk again in a month. What's working? What isn't? A set date keeps the plan alive and gives everyone a chance to adjust.

When	Your first 30 days
Week 1	Compare notes with family. Hold a first one-on-one conversation with your loved one.
Week 2	Hold a short family meeting. Agree on one or two priorities. Book a doctor's visit if needed.
Week 3	Explore options. Call Ideal Caregivers 4u or Ontario Health atHome. Book a free consultation.
Week 4	Start small with support. Set a date to check in and adjust together.

How Professional Support Helps

Getting started is often the hardest part. We make it simple. It starts with a conversation, then an assessment of needs at home.

From there, we build a care plan, match a caregiver, and adjust as things change. Your family stays involved at every step. Your loved one stays in the driver's seat.

IMPORTANT

When Not to Wait

Most changes allow time for gentle conversations. Some don't. Contact your loved one's doctor promptly if you notice any of these:

- Sudden confusion, or a sharp change in memory or behaviour
- A fall, especially with injury or trouble getting up
- Wandering or getting lost in familiar places
- Not eating, or signs of dehydration
- Unsafe driving, like new dents, near misses, or getting lost
- Signs of scams, missing money, or someone taking advantage

In an emergency, always call 911.

Tool 1: Holiday Visit Observation Checklist

Tick what you notice. Add a short note. Share it with family after your visit.

Home

✓	What I noticed	Notes
☐	Unopened mail or unpaid bills	
☐	Clutter, dust, or laundry piling up	
☐	Burnt pots, stale smells, or dirty dishes	
☐	Dead plants or neglected pets	

Food & Medications

☐	Empty or expired food in the fridge	
☐	Noticeable weight loss or gain	
☐	Missed, doubled, or confused medications	

Mobility & Safety

☐	Holding furniture or walls to walk	
☐	New bruises or unexplained injuries	
☐	Trouble with stairs, bath, or getting up	
☐	New dents or scrapes on the car	

Memory & Mood

☐	Repeating stories or questions	
☐	Missed appointments or lost items	
☐	Withdrawn, low, or easily upset	
☐	Dropped hobbies, clubs, or friends	

Tool 2: Conversation Starters

Pick one or two. You don't need a script. You just need a gentle way in.

To open the door

- "How have things been going for you lately, really?"
- "Is there anything around the house that's gotten harder?"

About daily life

- "What does a normal day look like for you now?"
- "Are you still getting out to see your friends?"

About health

- "How are you feeling about your medications?"
- "When did you last see your doctor? How did it go?"

About the future

- "If things got harder, what would you want to happen?"
- "What matters most to you about staying here?"

When they push back

- "That's fair. Can we talk again next week?"
- "I'm not trying to take over. I just want to help you stay independent."

Notes:

Tool 3: Family Meeting Agenda

Keep it to about 45 minutes. Include your loved one if you can. Assign someone to take notes.

Time	Agenda Item	Tips
5 min	Welcome and purpose	"We're here because we love you and want to plan together."
10 min	What we've each noticed	Share facts, not blame. Use your checklist notes.
10 min	What matters most to [loved one]	Let them speak first. Listen without interrupting.
10 min	Options and ideas	Talk about public care, private care, and family help.
5 min	Who does what	Assign clear tasks and owners.
5 min	Next check-in date	Pick a date within the next month.

What we decided

Decision or task	Who	By when

Our next check-in date: _____

LEARN MORE

Helpful Canadian Resources

Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI). Research on home care and long-term care in Canada.

cihi.ca

Government of Canada: Plan Now to Age in Place. A free checklist for planning ahead.

canada.ca

Ontario Health atHome. Publicly funded home care for Ontario residents.

ontariohealthathome.ca

Health Link Alberta. Call 811 for health advice and to ask about home care in Alberta.

About Ideal Caregivers 4u

Since 1998, Ideal Caregivers 4u has helped seniors live safely and happily at home. Our care is built on three values: respect, integrity, and compassion.

We offer companionship, personal care, nursing support, dementia care, 24-hour care, and more. Every plan starts with your loved one's goals.



We proudly serve families in Ottawa, Mississauga, Markham, Pickering-Ajax, Oshawa-Whitby, and Edmonton.

Let's talk about what comes next

Noticed something this Thanksgiving? You don't have to figure it out alone.

Call 1-866-372-0603

Visit idealcaregivers4u.com/services/

Email info@idealcaregivers4u.com