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Tips on caring for aging parents

By [THERESA WALKER](#)

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Keziah Clarke is the community education manager for Orange County's Council on Aging. Before going to work for the nonprofit organization, she served as a volunteer. And before that, she was wrapped up in caring for her elderly parents while working full time at another job.

She says her family was unprepared when her father, who lived in another state, began suffering from dementia and needed help.

"It's pretty devastating when it hits you all of a sudden," she says. She spent a lot of time away from her job, getting him settled with a caregiver.

Clarke's father passed away about five years ago; she was better prepared to help her mother more recently.

She offered these tips:

- Communicate with the older adult to figure out what he or she needs.
- Don't take on the role of a parent. If the person needing care is still mentally alert, keep him or her part of the decision making.
- Design a plan of action with other family members ahead of time.
- Keep communication open with family members and accept how people deal with things differently.
- Assign roles to those involved in the caregiving.
- Make sure necessary legal documents are in place, such as a health care directive and a power of attorney.
- Take care of yourself and be willing to accept help from others.
- Seek out resources available in the community, either through government agencies or nonprofit organizations.

Clarke recommends a free app called CarePartners Mobile that allows a private network of people, such as family members, to coordinate caregiving tasks for elderly loved ones.

Clarke also is involved in an education initiative launched this year by the Council on Aging to help others get ready for the day they may be called upon to assist their parents.

Instead of holding informational classes on weekends when the target audience was often too busy to attend, the organization is taking the classes to places of employment as one-hour lunch-and-learn workshops. Employers pay a fee of \$350.

Taught by gerontologist Karen Fazio of Cal State Fullerton, the classes mostly have been attended by people in the baby boomer generation, but people in their 30s have shown up, too, Clarke says.

Fazio, says Clarke, once owned a company that provided caregiving services and also took care of her own mom and dad. "She gives them what happened to her, the good, the bad, the ugly. She doesn't try to pretty it up, and they really appreciate that."

Fazio also provides materials and other information on resources in the community.

For more information on the lunch-hour classes, contact Clarke by phone at 714-479-0107, ext. 227, or email kclarke@coaoc.org.

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