



“My friend is caring for an adult son who suffered a serious injury. She sounds exhausted but ignores my suggestions to take care of herself. What can I do?”

Your friend is carrying an enormous weight. Caring for someone who is seriously ill is one of the most demanding things a person can do. It's natural to want to help, and you might feel discouraged when she doesn't act on your suggestions. Here's what might be going on and some tips to consider trying instead.



Try stepping into her shoes

She's overwhelmed. Managing daily care, medications, appointments, her job and daily responsibilities leaves almost no bandwidth for anything else, including processing your suggestions. *“If you haven't been a caregiver,” says Family Consultant Jo McCord, “you don't really know the amount of work and stress that comes with that role.”*

Stepping away isn't easy for her. Many caregivers quietly worry that wanting a break means they're failing their loved one. Accepting help or admitting they're struggling can feel like weakness or selfishness, even when it isn't. She may also worry that no one else will be able to care for her son the way she can.

You're only seeing snapshots of her life. She's walked every step of this journey. She's likely researched helpful tips and information online. Suggestions that assume otherwise can unintentionally come across as dismissing the work she's already done.



What you can do instead

Be her friend, not her advisor. Meet her where she is, not where you think she should be. Ask about her daily reality, let her share on her own timeline and only offer advice when she asks for it. *“Be thoughtful and sensitive to her situation,” says Family Consultant Adriana Sanchez. “There's no room for criticism; you have to be gentle.”*

Don't ask "How can I help?" Just help. *“People get so stressed out, they get frozen,” says Sanchez. “They think nothing will help.”* Instead of asking for a task, offer your help with something specific: pick up groceries, schedule appointments or sit with her son so she can have a break. The easier it is for her to say yes or no, the better.

Get specific with resources. If you think she needs, for example, a support group, do the legwork for her. Find one that actually fits her situation, get the contact info and hand it over to her; don't just point her in a general direction.

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**Adriana Sanchez
Family Consultant**

When Caregivers Reject Offers of Support, continued...

Offer help, then step back. You may be proud of your research or attached to an idea, but she's the expert on her circumstances and bandwidth. Put it out there, then let her decide. No nagging.

Just listen. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is sit with her and let her talk. No fixing, no judging; just show up with an open heart. *"We think they need this and that," McCord says, "and yes, they need that, but they also need someone to just hear them. That is an important role for someone too, and you'll also get information that way."*



How to respond if you're the caregiver

It's okay to redirect unsolicited advice. Try: "I know you want to help and I appreciate that. I need someone to listen right now, not problem-solve." A clear, gentle redirect is better for both of you than quietly pulling away.

Feel pressured by repeated social invitations? Be matter-of-fact. Try: "I want to see you, and I appreciate being included, but I can't commit to time out right now." People who've never been a caregiver don't always get it, and that's okay.

Invite friends into your world instead. Ask them to sit with you while you're caregiving, or suggest something they can do to pitch in. This gives them a real way to show up for you and puts the ball in their court.

Say "yes" to help. Don't be hesitant to accept help from your friends and loved ones. You'd probably do the same for them if they were in your shoes. If you're having trouble with this, read our factsheet, [*Saying Yes to Offers of Help*](#).



Some encouraging last words

Supporting a caregiving friend with small, thoughtful gestures that meet her where she is will be much more helpful than unsolicited advice or information she's likely already considered. Lead with curiosity, offer concrete help and when in doubt, just show up and listen. The friendship itself is a lifeline, and that means more than you know.

