

Understanding Resistance to Care

ADDITIONAL TIPS

Reframing the Goal

Instead of focusing on getting someone to accept care, shift to thinking about:

- Supporting their independence
- Improving safety and quality of life
- Working together as a team

When to Escalate

Additional support or intervention may be necessary. Consider escalating if:

- Safety is at risk
- Health needs are being neglected
- Cognitive decline is worsening
- You are overwhelmed or experiencing caregiver burnout

This may look like involving a healthcare provider or consulting a care manager.

Resistance to care occurs when an older adult refuses help, services, or conversations about support—even when needs are evident. This may include refusing in-home help, rejecting conversations about care needs, or becoming defensive, angry, or withdrawn when help is suggested. This is a common and expected response. Remember, care decisions rarely happen in one conversation.

1

Start with empathy.

Honor and acknowledge their opinions, preferences and independence. Ask open-ended questions and focus on having a discussion. Bringing in help can be a reminder of the losses your loved one is experiencing. Remember, both you AND your loved one are trying to cope with these changes.

2

Find the right timing.

Avoid conversations during stressful situations, immediately after an incident (such as a fall), or during moments of frustration.

3

Be gently honest.

Share concerns using supportive language, such as “I’ve noticed..” or “Have you been feeling this, too?” This reduces defensiveness and invites collaboration.

4

Come with options.

Instead of telling them what to do, present multiple care options and let them participate in the decision-making. Ask what options they have thought of.

5

Give them space and time to process.

Resistance often comes with strong emotions. Allow time between conversations and revisit the topic gradually. Even strong resistance does not mean the conversation has failed, but it often means the person needs more time to process.

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