



Between Friends

Thoughts on Caregiving

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Be Prepared! Emergency Preparedness for Caregivers

September is the month in which we celebrate National Adult Day Services Week, a time for people unfamiliar with adult day services to learn more about the variety of programs available at adult day centers throughout the country. This year, September has also been designated National Preparedness Month by the Office of Homeland Security and the American Red Cross. The perfect opportunity for looking at how prepared we really are – for emergencies, and for caring for our aging family members.

Fortunately, those of us in southeastern Michigan are probably more likely to experience power outages, minor flooding, and water use alerts than terrorist events (we hope, anyway). We have seen countless stories on TV, and read countless articles about how to prepare ourselves and our loved ones for emergencies. The losses experienced by millions of people as a result of hurricane Katrina are yet another reminder of how vulnerable we are, and what we should be doing to prepare ourselves and those we love.

So...have *you* prepared *your* household emergency kit? If so, good for you! If not, pick up a copy of [Emergency Preparedness for Caregivers: Tips for Household and Personal Emergency Supply Kits](#), which is a reprint of an article in the September 2003 issue of *Between Friends*.

If you're like most of us, however, you've become complacent. Ignorance is bliss, and a lot easier to deal with – until a crisis hits, of course. So what's your excuse?

"She isn't bad enough." For each caregiver who calls to inquire about A Friend's House, but insists their loved one "isn't bad enough" to need care just yet, there are just as many (if not more) who say "I wish I had known about A Friend's House years ago" when their loved one would have been more able to enjoy and benefit from participation in adult day services.

"It's okay to leave him alone. He's never wandered away from home." Just because a person hasn't wandered away from home yet doesn't mean he or she won't. An estimated 40 to 60% of people with Alzheimer's disease or other memory loss will, in fact, wander at some point. The time to be prepared is now. Enroll in the Alzheimer's Association's **Safe Return** program. Make sure both you and your loved one carry emergency contact information when you leave home. Install alarms on doors, or sensors to alert you (and others) when your loved one tries to leave (or someone else tries to enter!) your home.

"I'm always with her. She never goes anywhere without me." So, what happens if you're the one who falls when you're out shopping – or when you're at home? What happens if you wake up one morning with a horrible case of the flu, or with chest pains? Is your loved one capable of calling 911 for you? Does she know how to call another family member, or a neighbor? If not, now is the time to make emergency plans for when you are sick or need care.

Do you have a cellular phone? Is it programmed to direct dial certain people? It should be. Since the bombings in London, a number of people are suggesting that we program our cellular phones to have ICE contacts – In Case of Emergency numbers.

Don't have a cellular phone? Then keep those emergency contacts handy by your phones at home, and in your wallet or purse. Have the names and numbers for several people, not just one or two.

No family or friends nearby? Invest in a personal call system, where help is available to you at the touch of a button, for a small monthly fee. Check into home care agencies, parish nurses, or geriatric care managers to be contacted when you need help.

"I don't need help caring for him. I can handle things." Just because you're able to handle things today doesn't mean you will be able to tomorrow. And how well are you handling things? Feeling a bit stressed? Sad? Angry? Upset? Too many caregivers view asking for help as a sign of weakness. Just because you don't need a break doesn't mean your loved one wouldn't benefit from some time away from you! Check out adult day services, or caregiver support groups. Investigate sources for in-home respite (someone to stay with your loved one at home for a few hours) as well as out-of-home respite (places where you can take your loved one for a weekend or extended stay). A change of scene can do wonders – for both of you.

"I have a power of attorney. I don't need anything else." Got a power of attorney for health care? If so and it's been a while, does it also give you or your designated advocate access to your or your loved one's medical records, as now required by HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996?) Does it include a durable power of attorney for mental health treatment? Check it out.

Be prepared. For yourself, as well as for those you love.

A Friend's House Adult Day Services

A program of Catholic Services of Macomb

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