

Accommodations for Caregivers

THOUGHTFUL SOLUTIONS FOR CARING SPACES/



A STATISTIC TO consider: Approximately 22.9 million American households provide unpaid care to an adult family member or friend. Not to be confused with paid personal care aids or assistants, these caregivers on average provide 21 hours of care per week, often while working full- or part-time outside the home. But, this “free” care all-too-often comes at a cost to the caregivers—they can experience feelings of isolation, depression and stress from balancing work, family and caregiving responsibilities.

Along with relief from the physical demands of care, these caregivers need emotional support, their own space and some sort of diversion or a hobby. This is where the design community can help, by meeting their needs with thoughtful design solutions. As with any project, no two families and situations are the same, and each must be evaluated and addressed according to their individual needs.

Appropriately meeting the needs of both caregiver and cared-for can range from simple consultation on an existing home, to remodeling or renovation plans, consulting on a new home purchase, or being part of the team that builds a custom residence. In meeting these varied needs, two important areas to address are providing a respite space for the caregiver and ensuring the safety of the care recipient.

The home should have a designated area for the caregiver. It should be that individual’s private sanctuary and personal space. The time they spend in this respite area is theirs and theirs alone. As with any design, this space is dependent on many factors, such as the needs of the client, the allowable space to work with, the budget and the design wishes of the client. This area need not be as luxurious as an entire suite. If circumstances require, something as simple as a comfortable chair in the corner of a room will serve the required purpose. Ultimately, it’s a place where the caregiver can escape temporarily to get much-needed relief from the physical and emotional exhaustion they may feel.

As for the care recipient, safety is always paramount. Think prevention: It’s very difficult to predict what an ailing resident might do. Checking the safety of the home will help the caregiver take control of—and eliminate—potential problems that may create hazardous situations. It is almost always more effective to change the environment than to change behaviors. By minimizing the danger in the home you can maximize the independence of the resident. A safer home reduces stress for all involved.

Additionally, when designing for the care recipient, pay particular attention to entryways and

walkways; be sure they are clear and unobstructed. Specify adequate lighting to all areas of the home, especially in the halls and walkways. Do not add anything to the décor that could be a potential fall hazard. If area rugs are used in the space, for example, be sure they are secured. Or better yet, incorporate the feel of an area rug into the floor design. For families who are dealing with dementia, it’s important for them to have plenty of storage space, especially locking storage. Anything that is a potentially dangerous item needs to be locked away, including medications, cleaning supplies, toxic materials, tools, knives and breakable items. These are just a few suggestions to keep in mind. You will find when working with the caregiver and the family that these suggestions just scratch the surface of their needs.

Our goal is to bring peace of mind to all who occupy the space. In the end, we are improving their quality of life, protecting the health, safety and welfare of the caregiver and their family and providing them with a beautiful environment. **i**

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