

In-Home Companion—Privately Hired (Non Agency) Tips

There are two ways to hire help when your loved one needs assistance to remain in his/her home or your home:

- ❑ The in-home companion can be hired from a home health agency or private duty firm. In this instance, the home health agency or private duty firm does the hiring for you. If you choose this option, ask the Alzheimer’s Association Helpline (800) 272-3900 for the in-home agency listing. **OR**
- ❑ You can hire an independent in-home companion. Under this option, you are responsible for finding, hiring, training, directing, taxing, and if necessary, firing your in-home companion. You become the “employer”. With careful planning, it is possible to find the right person for the job. Below are some guidelines for you to follow if you are considering hiring an independent in-home companion.

What kind of help do you need?

In order to hire good in-home help, you need to inform applicants what they will be expected to do, should they be hired. A task form can be filled out to serve as a job description. Listed below is a sample task form. Each task has a space to indicate the ability of your loved one to do the specific task and indicates who will provide the assistance if necessary. Check the appropriate boxes.

This form will help in keeping track of what you are already getting help with and what you are going to need assistance with. However, it is important to realize that your loved one’s needs will vary with time and it may be necessary to revise the in-home help’s “job description”.

Sample Task Form	How much help does your loved one need?			Who will help your loved one with the tasks?		
	None	Some	Complete	Self	Fam/Friend	Hire
Bathing						
Dressing						
Grooming						
Transfer						
Walking						
Medication						
Meals						
Shopping						
Housework						
Laundry						
Bills						
Transportation						

What should you include in a job description and work agreement?

After filling out the task form, create a job description, which will be used as the work agreement. Many times office supply stores have blank work agreement sheets you can buy. When defining the job, make sure you include in writing at least the following:

- ❑ A detailed list of duties to be carried out.
- ❑ A statement of wages and benefits.
- ❑ Hourly wage, mileage reimbursement, and meals.
- ❑ Paid time off; if any.
- ❑ Hours of work and schedule.
- ❑ Whether or not the companion can bring children to the home.
- ❑ Unacceptable behaviors – with the consequences noted.
- ❑ How to fire the person if things don't work out. Note: Your loved one cannot fire the companion—only *you* can.
- ❑ Places for signatures of employer and employee (you and the companion).
- ❑ State who will be responsible for having supplies/equipment available.
- ❑ Also, clarify your rights as a caregiver:
 - Caregivers can do surprise visits.
 - Caregivers can investigate anything the person with dementia says about the companion.
 - Caregivers have the right to ask questions of the companion.
 - Caregivers have the right to set the rules for the companion.

Where can you find a companion?

- ❑ Before looking, it is a good idea to ask your insurance agent about your homeowner's liability coverage as it applies to someone employed in your home.
- ❑ **Use caution!**
- ❑ Let **friends and relatives** know you are looking for someone. They may personally recommend someone.
- ❑ Contact local **churches, senior centers, and area agencies on aging.**
- ❑ Try local area **colleges or universities**, especially those with nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social work, or gerontology programs. They may be able to provide you with names of people who do this work or be willing to place a note about your need in a newsletter or bulletin board. If the **career centers** on college campuses have online databases, try advertising on those.
- ❑ Nonprofit **community agencies** (usually listed under "Social and Human Services for Individuals & Families" in the phone book) may have lists of people looking for in-home work.
- ❑ **Advertise** in the newspaper (although, this should be your last resort). Make sure to spell out the highlights of your need so that you can limit the amount of pre-screening you need to do. At the minimum, the advertisement should include: hours, a brief job description, telephone number, and the best time to call. **Do not list your full name or address.**

How do you screen applicants?

When a person calls you in response to your ad or inquiry:

- Ask some basic questions to exclude unqualified candidates:
 - Do you have experience as a companion?
 - Do you have a driver's license?
 - Are you currently working?
 - Why are you attracted to this job?
- Describe the job in detail.
- Tell them what you expect them to be doing.

If you do not feel the individual is what you are looking for, be honest and tell them so. If the person is still interested and you are comfortable, tell the applicant you'll send them a formal application. You can sometimes obtain blank application forms from office supply stores. Making the applicant fill out an application and mailing it to you gives you further opportunity to screen the individual.

Job applications should ask things like: social security number, driver's license number, education/training/licensure, employment history, references, hobbies, legal troubles, emergency contacts, and places lived in the past three years. The latter is important to consider because background checks only include the state of Missouri. If you still feel comfortable after looking over the application, schedule an interview. It is a good idea to do the interview some place other than your home for security reasons.

What should you ask in an interview?

Sometimes it is helpful to bring another person along to observe and provide a second opinion.

- Bring the application, notepaper, and additional questions for the interview.
- Go over the application with the person, asking for more information when the information is not clear or unusual.
- Ask other questions. Keep focused and have the person do most of the talking. Take notes to help you remember their answers.
 - Why are you looking for work?
 - How do you feel about caring for another person, especially a person with dementia?
 - Do you have training in care for the elderly? Do you have any knowledge about Alzheimer's disease or dementia?
 - Have you attended an educational program or training session at the Alzheimer's Association?
 - What types of activities are you willing to do with the Alzheimer's patient?
 - How do you handle persons who may become upset, combative, or violent?
 - Do you have any emotional or physical problems which may hinder you on the job?
 - Will you do light cooking? Housework? Shopping?
 - Is there anything in the job description which you would not do?
 - What commitment to staying with this job are you willing to make?
 - Are you insured? Bonded?
 - Do you have transportation?
 - Are you willing to submit to background checks?
 - Can you safely lift or transfer an individual?
- Before ending the interview, remind the applicant that you will need to check references, do a background screening, and a criminal record check before making a decision.
- After the interview: Review and finalize notes. Jot down impressions.

Ready to Hire? Not Just Yet!

Once you have found someone you like (or two or three) and feel comfortable with them, then:

1. See if the companion is getting Dementia Specific training!
2. Always ask for references and check them out.
3. Learn about what you need to know when offering the job and becoming an employer.
4. Complete a background screening.

1.) The Alzheimer's Association, St. Louis Chapter offers several opportunities for the independent companion to receive training. Request a family or professional education calendar from the Education Institute (AAEI) by calling the 24 Hour Helpline at (800) 272-3900. The library at the Alzheimer's Association has a wide assortment of videos and books available for rental or purchase. You can also go to our website at <http://www.alzstl.org>. Check it out!

2.) Reference Checks are a critical piece to finding a qualified companion. Some questions to ask references:

- How long have you known the applicant? Dates? In what relationship?
- What was his/her position?
- Can you tell me more about his/her responsibilities?
- How did the person get along with you and with senior adults, especially people with Dementia?
- What were your impressions of him/her as a worker?
- Did he/she show initiative, or wait to be told what to do?
- Was the person reliable/dependable?
- What were the applicant's strengths? Weaknesses?
- How did the applicant handle difficult or stressful situations?
- Did you find him/her trustworthy and honest?
- Were you aware of any problems with drugs or alcohol?
- Is he/she still working for you? If not, would you re-hire?
- Describe the job situation and ask the reference if he/she thinks the applicant would be a good match for the position.

3.) What you need to know when offering the job and becoming an employer:

- Let the person know as soon as you decide and set up a time to meet.
- Contact the IRS for information about social security withholding.
- Be aware of possible legal and financial pitfalls of paying in cash instead of by check.
- Use receipt forms or other proof of payments to the companion.
- Keep a record of any serious problems you have with the companion.
- Go over the layout of the home, and discuss rules.
- At the meeting, establish a work and payment contract with the companion. Review the work contract with the employee and you and the companion should both sign it and each keep a copy.

4.) Get a background screening and criminal record check. Contact the Family Care Safety Registry:

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
PO Box 570, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0570
Call (573) 751-6400 (7am-6pm CST M-F)
Fax: (573) 751-6010 or Email: info@health.mo.gov

About the Family Care Safety Registry

Per the Family Care Safety Registry website (<http://health.mo.gov/safety/fcsr/>): “The passage of House Bill 490 created the Family Care Safety Registry (FCSR) and gave the Department of Health and Senior Services, in coordination with the Department of Social Services and the Department of Public Safety, the task of creating the Registry and toll-free access line effective January 1, 2001. The passage of SB 48 in 2001 provided further enhancements to the FCSR. The implementation of the FCSR helps ensure that persons who care for children, the elderly and the physically or mentally disabled can be screened for employment purposes. The law requires that every child care and elder care worker hired on or after January 1, 2001, and personal care workers hired on or after January 1, 2002 to register. **NOTE: For compliance with section 660.317, RSMo., employees of licensed home health agencies or in-home services providers contracting with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services must register regardless of hire date.** Families and other employers may contact the Registry to obtain a background screening at no cost using a toll-free access line, by FAX, by mail, or by Internet request.”

How to report elder abuse

Any person who has a reason to believe an adult is a victim of elder abuse; report this information to the Division of Aging's Elder Abuse Hotline at 1-800-392-0210.

Missouri law provides that people who report or cooperate in an investigation will be immune from criminal or civil liability. The identity of the reporter shall not be disclosed without the reporter's permission or order of the court. Anonymous reports are also accepted.

Warning signs of elder abuse:

- Bruises, cuts, abrasions
- Bizarre behavior
- Bed sores
- Lack of necessities such as food, utilities or medication
- Unsafe living conditions
- Difficulty with self-care
- Depression
- Misuse of funds/property

What Elder Abuse May Include:

- **Physical Abuse:** Hitting, shoving, shaking or slapping
- **Financial Exploitation:** Stealing by deceit or taking control of assets or income without the person's consent
- **Emotional Abuse:** Yelling, humiliating or threatening an elder
- **Sexual Abuse:** Nonconsensual sexual molestation and/or contact
- **Self-Neglect:** Failing to provide for one's basic needs of daily living, personal care, shelter, food, medical care or safety
- **Neglect:** Denial of basic needs for food, shelter, personal care, medical attention or safe oversight by another.