WHEN IT'S TIME

Navigating the move into care for someone you love

by
JD Brimblecombe

A Brief Message

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Deciding whether a loved one needs more support or residential care is one of the most difficult stages of caring.

Over the years, I've supported several loved ones through this transition, and I've seen how challenging it can be for families. This moment rarely arrives in a clear or predictable way. It often brings a mix of strong emotions, different opinions, practical limitations, and changes in health that can seem to happen all at once.

What is possible or sustainable can look very different for every family.

I created this resource because I understand how complex and overwhelming this stage can feel. My hope is that it helps you make sense of what you're facing and reassures you that you're not alone in these thoughts and decisions.

If these pages help you feel more informed, or simply a little less alone as you consider what comes next, then this guide has done what it was designed to do.

With care

JD Brimblecombe

Why this resource exists

This resource was created by a carer, for those facing one of the most difficult moments in caring.

The point where you're no longer sure what the right next step looks like.

Moving a loved one into care is rarely a single decision made at one moment in time. It is usually a process shaped by changes in health, family dynamics, unexpected events, and difficult conversations.

This guide explores some of the situations carers commonly face, including :

- when decisions are made quickly during a crisis
- when families try to manage at home for longer than is safe
- when care is discussed gradually and chosen with support

Every situation is different.

But understanding how these situations unfold can help carers make sense of where you are and what you may be facing.

**"There is no right or wrong way to arrive at this point.
There is only the reality you're navigating,
and you don't have to do that alone."**

JD Brimblecombe

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WHEN IT'S TIME

Navigating the move into care for someone you love

This section introduces a point many carers eventually face.

The point where caring at home is no longer working in the same way, and the question of more support or residential care begins to come into focus.

For some families, this shift happens gradually. For others, it follows a sudden change in health or a hospital stay.

Either way, it can bring uncertainty, difficult conversations, and decisions many carers never expected to face.

The following pages explore how this stage can unfold.

"In caring for others, we find the best in ourselves."

Anonymous

When It's Time

You're here because something is shifting

If you're reading this, something has likely changed. No matter how much care you provide at home, or how much help you bring in, it no longer feels like enough. The level of care keeps increasing.

As a carer, your responsibilities can start to grow quickly. What you're managing day to day becomes more involved, more constant, and harder to sustain.

For many people, it starts with in-home help. A couple of days a week. Then it increases. Two days become four or five. Meals are delivered. Cleaners come in, and so on. And somewhere along the way, you begin to realise this may not be sustainable.

Just managing the care alone can start to feel like a full-time job. You might have looked into outside support, only to find the costs are high, the availability is limited, or the services aren't always reliable.

Even with added support, there are still gaps. If someone isn't there all the time, your loved one may be at risk. What feels manageable during the day can become much harder at night.

This can be a frustrating and pressured time. You care deeply about the person you love, but the situation itself is changing, and your life is changing with it.

You may be starting to ask questions you weren't asking before. You may be facing this on your own, or alongside family.

There is no single way families arrive at this point.

When It's Time

This is one of the hardest points in caring

For many carers, this stage brings a mix of emotions:

- uncertainty
- guilt
- grief
- fear of making the wrong decision

You may find yourself asking:

- How do I know if it's time?
- What if we wait too long?
- What if we move too soon?
- What if the family doesn't agree?

At the same time, the person you love may be feeling frightened, resistant, confused, or even angry. In some cases they may be quietly relieved.

The decision is rarely simple

Moving into care is rarely one clear decision made by one person.

Sometimes circumstances change suddenly and decisions are made quickly.

Sometimes families continue managing at home longer than is safe.

Sometimes the person needing care is still able to be part of the conversation.

Often, it is a combination of all three.

Each situation brings its own challenges, for you and for the person you love.

The following sections explore how these situations can unfold, to help you make sense of where you are and what you may be facing.

"Sometimes the hardest thing and the right thing are the same

Anonymous

Section 2

THERE IS NO ONE RIGHT WAY INTO CARE

People often talk about “moving into care” as though it happens at a single moment, following one clear decision.

In reality, it rarely happens that way.

Some families arrive at this point suddenly, after a health event or hospital stay. Others arrive gradually, after months or years of trying to manage at home. And sometimes the decision unfolds through conversations, planning, and support over time.

Every situation is different, and each path brings its own challenges.

There is no one right way into care

I've seen this happen in very different ways

Over the years, I've supported loved ones through this transition more than once, and each experience looked different.

In one situation, a loved one moved directly from hospital into care. There was little time to plan, very few choices available, and everything happened quickly while emotions were running high.

In another, a loved one remained at home longer than was safe. Health and wellbeing gradually declined while everyone hoped things might stabilise. Eventually, the risks became too great to ignore.

And in another situation, the decision was made with time for discussion, guidance, and the involvement of the person needing care. It was still emotional, but dignity, choice, and voice were part of the process.

Each path brought its own challenges.

Each path carried its own emotions.

Each path was shaped by love.

"The most important thing in the world is family and love."

John Wooden

There is no one right way into care

Your situation may look different again

You might be:

- supporting someone who resists the idea of care
- caring for someone still making their own decisions
- carrying most of the day-to-day responsibility
- navigating increasing needs or safety concerns
- part of a family where opinions differ

You may recognise parts of your situation in these experiences, or feel like yours sits somewhere in between.

At the same time, the person you love may be experiencing their own emotions, fear, frustration, uncertainty, or sometimes relief.

Both perspectives matter.

As we continue

In the next sections, we explore some of the situations carers commonly face when the question of care becomes unavoidable.

You may recognise your situation clearly in one of these.

Or you may find your circumstances sit somewhere in between.

Section 3

WHEN DECISIONS FEEL OUT OF YOUR CONTROL

"Tough times never last, but tough people do"

Robert H. Schuller

When decisions feel out of your control

When everything speeds up before you're ready

This is often how it happens.

One day you're managing everything that comes with caring. Not just your loved one's health, but the day-to-day running of their life. Cooking, cleaning, paying bills, organising appointments, speaking with family, and constantly keeping an eye on their safety.

You're also coordinating everything around the home. Organising maintenance, arranging lawn mowing or gardening, fixing things when they break, and managing purchases, delivery, and installation when something needs replacing.

You're also carrying the quieter worries. Whether they're eating properly, drinking enough, feeling lonely, or managing when you're not there.

Then something happens.

A fall.
A sudden decline.
A hospital admission.
And everything moves quickly.

You may be asked to make decisions before you've had time to process what has changed. At the same time, you may be trying to understand medical information, speak with professionals, and keep family members informed.

What makes this so difficult is the speed.

There is little time to pause, reflect, or catch up with what is happening.

When decisions feel out of your control

When you realise, you're no longer in control

This is the part many carers aren't prepared for.

Not having time to work out what will happen next can feel overwhelming.

As a carer, you're used to stepping in. Asking questions. Making decisions. That's often how you protect the person you love.

But in this moment, things can change.

You may find yourself speaking with doctors, nurses, and other professionals. Waiting for information. Trying to understand what's happening, while decisions are being discussed around you.

You may still be involved, but you're no longer in control in the same way.

That shift can feel unsettling, especially when you're already worried about the person you love.

Why loss of control is so hard for carers

Over time, many carers become confident decision-makers.

You gather information.

You ask questions.

You make thoughtful decisions.

Not because you want control, but because you carry responsibility.

When that role suddenly changes, it can feel unsettling.

For many carers, it can also affect their sense of purpose, especially if they have been caring for a long time.

If you find yourself feeling anxious, frustrated, or second-guessing your role, that response is understandable.

The situation has changed, and your role may now look different.

When decisions feel out of your control

Holding your loved one in mind

While you are trying to process decisions and new information, your loved one may be experiencing this very differently.

A sudden move into care can feel confusing and frightening. Familiar routines may disappear. New people may become involved in their care. Their sense of independence may feel like it is slipping away.

Fear, resistance, or withdrawal is often a response to vulnerability, not stubbornness or a lack of trust in you.

Your loved one may also be facing the possibility of leaving behind their home, their routines, and the life they know.

Keeping this in mind doesn't make the decisions easier. But it can help explain some of the emotions you may be seeing.

In these moments, more people may also become involved very quickly. Doctors, nurses, hospital staff, and family members may all have input into what happens next.

If it feels overwhelming, that's understandable.

Keeping this in mind doesn't make decisions easier. But it can help explain the emotions you may be seeing.

When decisions feel out of your control

What matters most right now

When decisions are taken out of your hands, it's easy to feel like you need to get everything right.

You don't have to.

What matters most is making the best decision you can with the information you have, in the time you're given.

Focusing on care, safety, and support is enough.

There is rarely a perfect decision in these moments. Only the most thoughtful one you can make at the time.

If this is where you are

If this reflects what you are experiencing, it's understandable if things feel uncertain. You may feel rushed. You may feel unsettled. You may still be trying to make sense of what has changed.

In moments like this, it's okay to ask questions more than once, and to take the time you need to understand what is being discussed.

You may also wish things had unfolded differently. Many carers do.

"Sometimes the hardest part isn't making the decision, it's realising you no longer get to."

JD Brimblecombe

A note on talking with medical professionals

When care decisions follow a hospital admission, you may find yourself speaking with doctors, nurses, social workers, and discharge planners, sometimes all at once. These conversations can feel confronting.

Medical professionals are responsible for sharing information, assessing risk, and explaining what they believe may need to happen next. Their communication can sometimes feel blunt or overwhelming, especially when you are already tired and trying to process what has changed.

It can help to remember that direct communication is not the same as a lack of care. Some professionals speak gently and offer a great deal of reassurance. Others communicate in a more direct and matter of fact way.

Both approaches can come from a genuine concern for your loved one.

As a carer, it is reasonable to:

- ask questions
- ask for clarification
- ask for information to be explained again
- ask what options may be available

You should expect information to be shared in a way you can understand.

If a conversation feels upsetting, it may reflect the situation you are facing rather than the intention behind the words being used.

If you're unsure what to do next, you can ask if there is an Aged Care Consultant or someone similar you can speak with. They can help guide you through what happens next, explain your options, and support you in understanding the decisions that need to be made. They can also help with paperwork and guide you through the ACAT assessment process if needed.

Section 4

WHEN STAYING AT HOME STARTS TO CAUSE HARM

"There are limits to what love alone can safely carry."

Rosalynn Carter

When staying at home starts to cause harm

When coping becomes the new normal

There is often a period where things don't feel okay, but you keep going anyway.

You adjust. You manage. You do what needs to be done.

What once felt temporary starts to become routine.

You may find yourself constantly responding to problems, rather than feeling like things are under control.

Each day can feel unpredictable.

You might start to notice that you are no longer getting ahead, you are just keeping up.

And even that can feel harder over time.

When staying at home starts to cause harm

The line is harder to see when you're living it

When you're living it day to day, the changes don't always feel obvious. They happen gradually.

You adjust as things change. You take on a little more. You find ways to make things work.

What might feel like a clear turning point from the outside can feel much less defined when you're in it.

For me, it didn't feel like something that changed over time. I never saw myself as a carer in the beginning.

Whenever someone referred to me that way, I would push back. I'd say I was a daughter, or a daughter-in-law.

I was happy to help, but I didn't want the label.

To me, it felt like too much responsibility. Like if I accepted it, I wouldn't be able to say no.

You may find yourself thinking it's just a bad day, that things might settle, or that you can manage a bit longer.

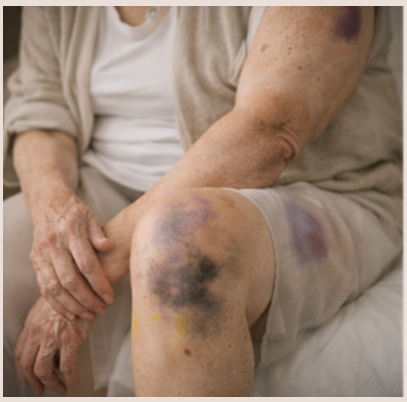
Because you care.

Because you want to keep things as they are for as long as possible.

Because it's hard to know where coping ends and something more is happening.

Looking back, I realise I had already stepped into the role long before I was ready to acknowledge it.

And by the time you start to question it, things may have already moved further than you realised.



When staying at home starts to cause harm

Why carers stay longer than they should

This can be one of the hardest things for carers to acknowledge.

Many carers stay in this situation longer than they expected. Not because they don't see what's happening, but because of everything tied to the decision.

You may feel guilty about even considering care, particularly if you have always had a close and loving relationship with your parent or loved one. For many people, the thought of moving someone they love into a care home can feel heartbreaking.

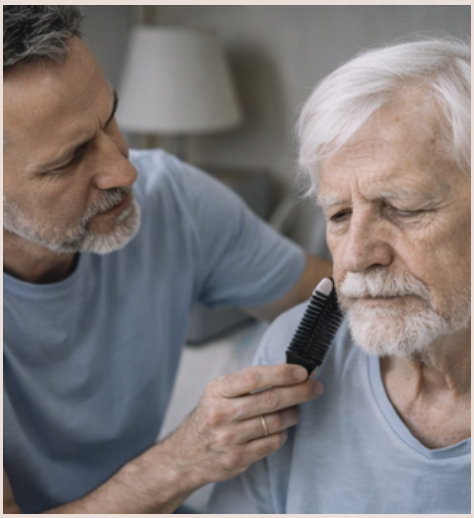
Some carers have space in their home and want to help, but know they may not be able to provide the level of care their loved one truly needs.

Others are raising their own families and trying to balance the needs of children, work, and a household alongside caring responsibilities.

You may also be carrying:

- promises made years ago
- hope that things might improve
- resistance from your loved one

Love and responsibility often keep carers going long after things have started to feel unmanageable.



When staying at home starts to cause harm

When your loved one doesn't agree

This is one of the most confronting positions a carer can be in.

You may be seeing risks that your loved one cannot or does not want to acknowledge.

You may lie awake worrying about their safety, while during the day you're told that everything is "fine".

Conversations about care can become tense or shut down completely.

Your loved one may feel angry, defensive, or unwilling to even consider the idea of outside help.

As a carer, you can find yourself caught between two difficult responsibilities:

- respecting your loved one's wishes;

  and

- recognising that the current situation may no longer be safe

Making a decision for someone who does not agree with you can be emotionally exhausting.

Even when you believe it is necessary, it can feel like a betrayal, and that feeling can stay with you long after the decision has been made.

"Loving someone doesn't always mean agreeing with them. Sometimes it means carrying the weight of a decision they're not ready to accept."

"Sometimes the safest choice is not the one that feels kindest."

Atul Gawande

When staying at home starts to cause harm

When safety and wellbeing have to come first

There often comes a point where continuing at home is no longer safe or sustainable. This is usually most visible in the person you care for. You may begin to notice increased risks, changes in health, or a decline in their ability to manage day to day life safely.

At the same time, the impact on you may also be building. Caring at this level can leave you exhausted, constantly alert, and carrying ongoing stress. You may find yourself always "on," watching, checking, and worrying about what might happen next. Interrupted sleep, mental load, and responsibility build up over time.

Carer burnout is real. When carers continue supporting a loved one at home beyond what is sustainable, often while carrying most of the responsibility themselves, tiredness can begin to shift into burnout.

Even when you are doing everything you can, the situation may continue to change. There can be a tension between wanting to respect your loved one's wishes and recognising that their safety and wellbeing are now at risk.

This is also when tension with siblings or your loved one's partner can begin to surface. Family members may have different views, different levels of involvement, or different understandings of what is really happening day to day.

Reaching this point is more common than you might think. It is a sign that your loved one's care needs have changed, often significantly.

When staying at home starts to cause harm

Making the decision doesn't mean you stopped caring

This is important to say clearly.

If you reach a point where staying at home is causing more harm than good, it does not mean you cared any less.

In many cases, it means you have cared for a long time, and have been responding to a situation that has gradually changed.

Making a decision your loved one may not want does not erase the care, patience, and effort that came before it.

It reflects the level of responsibility you have been carrying.

"What is in a loved one's best interest, and what they believe is best for themselves, are often not the same thing."

JD Brimblecombe

When staying at home starts to cause harm

If this is where you are

If you recognise yourself in this situation, you may be feeling torn between concern for your loved one and the responsibility you carry as a carer.

You may be wondering how much longer you can keep going.
You might be carrying guilt alongside worry.
Or feeling caught between love and responsibility.

These are common feelings for carers at this stage.

Recognising that the situation may need to change does not mean you are giving up. It means you are responding to what is happening, even when the decision is difficult.

For some families, the next stage involves supporting a loved one who is able to take part in conversations about care and future support.

The next section explores what that can look like.

> ***"There comes a point where continuing as before causes more harm, than change ever could."***
>
> Rosalynn Carter

Section 5

WHEN CARE IS CHOSEN WITH SUPPORT

"Listening is where care really begins."

Rachel Naomi Remen

When care is chosen with support

When there is time to talk

Sometimes families are able to discuss care before a crisis forces the decision.

These conversations may begin slowly.

A doctor may raise concerns. A fall or illness may prompt discussion. Your loved one may begin to recognise that managing at home is becoming harder.

When this happens, families may have more time to talk openly, explore options, and consider what support could look like.

The decision is still emotional.

But having time to talk can make the process feel more considered.

When care is chosen with support

What this often looks like for a carer

When there is time to talk about future care, the role of the carer can look a little different.

Instead of responding to a crisis, you may find yourself helping your loved one explore what support might involve.

You may be starting conversations about the future, researching care options, attending appointments or assessments, and helping your loved one think about what matters most to them.

These conversations often happen gradually.

One discussion may not lead to a decision. It may simply open the door to thinking about what support could look like in the future.

For many carers, this stage involves a lot of listening, patience, and reassurance.

When care is chosen with support

Guiding without forcing

When your loved one is still able to take part in decisions, conversations about care can require a careful balance.

You may find yourself gently raising concerns while also trying to respect their independence.

You may be sharing information, suggesting options, and encouraging them to think about what support could look like.

At times, these conversations move forward.

At other times, they may pause or circle back to where they started.

Guiding someone through this stage often means allowing them time to adjust to the idea of change.

For many carers, this can require patience and restraint, even when you are already feeling worried.

When care is chosen with support

What this can feel like for your loved one

Even when conversations about care happen calmly and with time to think, this stage can be difficult for your loved one.

They may be facing the possibility of leaving a home filled with years of memories.

They may worry about losing independence, routines, or the familiarity of living in their own space.

Some people feel relief at the idea of having more support.

Others feel uncertain, resistant, or afraid of what the change might mean.

These reactions are very human. They often reflect how much this stage of life asks someone to let go of.

Understanding this does not make the decision easier, but it can help explain some of the emotions that may arise during these conversations.

"To be with another in their uncertainty is often the greatest act of support we can offer."

"Even when a choice is right, it can still be painful."

David Kessler

When care is chosen with support

Why this still feels difficult

Even when conversations happen over time and decisions are made together, this stage can still be emotionally difficult.

You may feel sadness about the changes ahead.

You may question whether you are making the right decision.

You may feel relief that support will be available, while also experiencing a sense of grief about what is changing.

For some carers, there can be a sense of guilt about not being able to continue caring for their loved one in their own home.

These mixed emotions are common.

Being able to talk about care and plan ahead does not remove the significance of the decision.

It allows families to approach it with more time, discussion, and understanding.

When care is chosen with support

When families are involved

When there is time to talk about care, families are often part of the conversation.

Siblings, partners, or other close relatives may share their views, concerns, and hopes about what should happen next for your loved one.

Sometimes these conversations bring reassurance and support. Other times, they can be more complicated.

Family members may have different perspectives about what is best, different levels of involvement in day-to-day care, or different personal circumstances to consider.

These differences do not necessarily mean anyone cares more or less. They often reflect the many realities families are balancing at the same time.

When families are able to talk openly and listen to one another, these conversations can help everyone feel more prepared for the decisions ahead.

"When one family member has been carrying the day-to-day care, they often see things others can't. Differences of opinion don't usually come from a lack of care, but from a lack of shared experience."

JD Brimblecombe

When care is chosen with support

What this stage can offer

When families have time to talk and think about care, it can create space for more considered decisions.

Your loved one may be able to share what matters most to them. You may have time to explore care options, ask questions, and visit different facilities. Decisions may still feel emotional, but having time to prepare can help people feel more informed and involved.

In some situations, families are able to talk together and share the responsibility for the decision. In others, one person may find themselves carrying much of that responsibility alone.

Even when the decision rests with you, having time to consider the options can make the path forward feel clearer.

If this is where you are

You may be having conversations about care that feel both practical and emotional at the same time.

You might be trying to balance respect for your loved one's wishes with concerns about their safety and wellbeing.

You may find yourself listening, encouraging, and supporting them as they come to terms with needing more help.

Even when these conversations happen with time and understanding, they are rarely easy. They ask a great deal from everyone involved.

If you find yourself in this stage, it reflects the care and responsibility you have been carrying for your loved one for some time.

"In the end, it's not about doing everything.
It's about doing what matters."

Atul Gawande

When care is chosen with support

Looking ahead

Every family's path into care looks different.

Some decisions happen quickly during a crisis.

Others unfold gradually as the situation at home becomes harder to sustain.

And sometimes, families are able to talk, plan, and make decisions together over time.

Wherever you find yourself in this process, the decisions you are facing reflect the care you have for the person you love, and the responsibility you have been carrying.

Section 6

WHEREVER YOU ARE

"Pay attention to what feels most important right now."

Rachel Naomi Remen

Wherever you are

What matters most

Most carers don't fit neatly into one pathway.

You may have experienced moments of crisis, periods of long-term coping, and times of careful planning, sometimes all with the same person.

Wherever you are right now, there is no "right" way to reach this point.
There is only the way it has unfolded for you, shaped by health, timing, family dynamics, and circumstances beyond your control.

Wherever you are

You are responding to change, not causing it

One of the most difficult things carers carry is the feeling that this decision rests entirely on their shoulders.

Needing more care does not happen because of one conversation, one choice, or one missed moment.

It happens because things change.

The reason you are in this position is because your loved one is no longer able to care for themselves safely at home.

In many cases, this is part of the natural changes that come with ageing.

As a carer, you are not creating this situation.

You are responding to it, thoughtfully and carefully, and often at great personal cost.

That distinction matters.

Care does not end when care changes

Some carers worry that moving into care means stepping back or letting go.

In reality, care often changes shape rather than disappears.

For many carers, the role shifts from managing everything to:

- supporting
- advocating
- visiting
- staying connected

That change can bring relief, grief, and guilt, sometimes all at once.

None of those feelings cancel out the love that's always been there.

Wherever you are

Your loved one's experience matters.
And so does yours

Throughout this guide, I've encouraged you to hold your loved one's experience in mind.

But it is just as important to say this.

Your experience as a carer matters too.

You may be tired.
You might feel conflicted.
You may be grieving what is changing.

Those feelings do not make you selfish or weak.

They make you human.

Caring deeply for someone else does not mean ignoring yourself.

Wherever you are

You don't have to decide everything at once

This is not one single decision that gets made and locked in forever.

This is a process.

You are allowed to:

- pause
- ask more questions
- take things one step at a time
- change direction as needs change

As a carer, you don't need to have everything worked out today.

You just need to keep responding with care, and you already are.

> ***"Clarity comes from engagement, not from avoidance."***
>
> Margaret J. Wheatley

Wherever you are

Before you close this guide

If there is one thing I hope you take with you, it is this.

You are doing the best you can in a situation that is genuinely hard.

You are making decisions most people never have to face.

You are carrying responsibility that often goes unseen.

Whatever comes next, you do not have to navigate it alone.

A quiet reminder

If your loved one refuses to talk about care, if family members do not agree, or if you are uncertain about what to do next, this can be a difficult place to be.

Even if decisions have not been made yet, you can still gather information, ask questions, and learn more about what support and care could look like.

You might research options, visit facilities, speak with professionals, or talk with family or trusted friends.

At times, decisions need to be made quickly. Even then, taking the time to understand your options can help you move forward with more clarity.

You can take small, thoughtful steps forward, in a way that feels right for you and your loved one.

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