Many families enter the world of caregiving in unexpected ways. It often begins with a phone call: “Something’s happened; Mom/Dad/Auntie/ Uncle/Sister/Brother/etc. is not doing well.” Following this revelation, family members often have unrealistic expectations of what will happen. One of the biggest misconceptions when families begin their caregiving journey is that everyone in the family is able to (or wants to) help with the caregiving responsibilities. People build an idealistic scenario in their minds where everyone pitches in equally and works together to care for their loved one. There is a lot of talk about who “should” do what. Ultimately, having unrealistic expectations about different family members’ roles can take a toll on relationships and turn things sour.

Families each have their own unique type of dynamics and history. One of the biggest pitfalls we can make as caregivers is to assume that everyone else in the family is going to overlook past family history to cheerfully take up caregiving duties. It simply does not happen that way. Families have had years upon years to build their dynamics: perhaps a child is estranged, siblings do not get along, or not everyone wants to care for a relative...
along, a spouse is unhappy, a parent is cold and distant, etc. These dynamics did not develop overnight, but rather, have been years in the making. When we become caregivers, it is unrealistic to expect these relationships to change suddenly. It is important to accept that we need to work with what we have rather than unsuccessfully trying to reach an impossible ideal that “should” be.

A family meeting can help those families who need to get a handle on how to deal with caregiving. However, you must keep in mind that not everyone in the family feels the same way. Some may be more willing to help than others. Some may be more hands-on, while others prefer to contribute support financially. We need to keep in mind that everyone has his/her own strengths and weaknesses. We need to work toward using each person’s strengths to provide good care rather than trying to force people into duties they feel uncomfortable doing.

Many families often focus on dividing caregiving “equally,” which causes resentment in everyone involved. Remember, caregiving is not about equality in tasks; it is all about using each family member to their full potential to provide good care to your loved one. A family meeting can open the lines of communication about what people will or will not do, how they feel they can contribute best, or how involved they want to be. If you need help arranging a family meeting, speak to your Family Care Navigator to see how they can assist and guide you.