

## Getting the Bills Paid: Daily Money Managers Help Seniors Maintain Their Self-Respect

*(Editor's Note: The following includes a true story of how one [American Association of Daily Money Managers](#) (AADMM) member helped her client keep financial order. The client's name in this article has been changed to protect her privacy.)*

Illness, memory loss or a disability can lead to unpaid bills, cancelled insurance, misplaced mail and checkbooks in disarray. Unfortunately, in most situations, it isn't until problems develop that family members realize that a senior needs help.

Daily Money Managers (DMMs) are professionals who can help seniors with the financial tasks necessary to keep their lives running smoothly while keeping their self-respect intact. Depending on the senior's needs, a DMM might help organize tax records, balance checkbooks, pay bills, and file Medicare or insurance claims. They can also help clients develop budgets and track spending.

### **A true story: Tips for assisting seniors**

"I may be slow but I am not an imbecile!" Pat declared, voicing her frustration with her adult children. "I read and think much slower than I used to and my kids have no patience with me."

Pat is in her late 70s and has lost most of her vision. She needs help to read and manage her bills and personal paperwork.

When people need help they do not necessarily require or want someone to completely take over their money affairs. "Like driving, seniors rarely, if ever, choose to relinquish this important daily life task on their own," says Jean McCandless, a geriatric social worker and owner of Champlain Geriatric Services in Burlington, Vermont. "Financial helpers, whether family members or professionals, must be sensitive to a senior's sense of loss and anger at being expected to give up part or all of this long-held responsibility," says McCandless.

Daily Money Management services can help seniors maintain their independence and their sense of pride. AADMM member and Professional Daily Money Manager (PDMM) Robyn Young recommends some techniques for assisting elders:

**Set aside time.** As people age, it can take more time to process information and to get arthritic hands to work. When we, as helpers, are stressed or pressed for time, it can be frustrating to move at a slower pace. Schedule plenty of time to help the senior when you won't be distracted.

**Prioritize.** When you begin work, gather and go through all the paperwork and prioritize. If you run out of time to complete everything, the least important items can wait.

**Be respectful.** Regardless of the senior person's level of competence, speak to her as you would like to be spoken to yourself.

**Ask before doing.** This lets the senior determine how involved you are. I often ask, "How can I best help you?" If the person can't tell me or there are things that need to be done that he did not mention, I try, "I see that there are bills here that are due. How can I help you pay them?"

**Give choices.** If given a choice, people will often let their helpers do more. You could say, "Would you like to write the checks, or would it be helpful if I wrote the checks for you to sign?"

**Use visual aids.** If the person has poor eyesight, it helps to trace the lines on the check for the date, payee, dollar amount and signature in thick black ink. Large print checks can be purchased from banks and other check vendors. Large print check registers and check writing guides are also available.

**Help the senior to focus.** Many seniors like to tell stories. It can be frustrating to be reviewing a stack of mail and end up listening to the same story for the seventh time. Gently acknowledge and redirect the senior's attention. I find it helpful to say, "Larry, that is an interesting story and I'd love to hear it another time. Right now let's review this letter."

**Use the speaker phone.** When making telephone calls, turn on the speaker so the senior can hear and participate in the conversation.

**Find ways for the senior to participate.** Even simple tasks, such as putting stamps on envelopes, can help him stay involved.

**Explain as you go.** Tell the senior what you are doing as you work and what the mail says. Read letters out loud. Review the bills and how much is owed. When writing checks for the elder's signature, tell her the name of the payee and the amount of the check. Sometimes, and especially if the senior has dementia, it helps to write the date, payee name and amount on a fresh index card for each bill. Keep the card on the table where they can see it to save them the embarrassment of having to ask repeatedly for the information.

**Be forthright with information.** Show the elder her bank statement. Take the time to point out the date, the beginning and ending balance, and answer any questions that she may have. If she is worried about running out of money, let her know the plan in place to care for her and her assets or help the senior find competent advisors to assist her with putting a plan in place.

**Respect the senior's wishes.** Sometimes we may not agree with the elder's decisions. It is important not to criticize. If you suspect abuse or exploitation or that the senior's decision will negatively affect his well-being, you do need to investigate, but unsolicited opinions given to a competent adult can lead to arguments and a lack of trust. If you are trying to help but continually meet resistance, ask if there is someone else that the senior would rather have assist him.

**Consider whether you are the right person.** If you are overloaded with care giving responsibilities, it may be worthwhile to hire a DMM so you don't have to take on the financial tasks. DMMs can be found in 42 states and the province of Ontario, Canada by visiting [www.aadmm.com](http://www.aadmm.com) and clicking on "[Find A DMM.](#)" which allows you to search by state, city or ZIP code.

"Keeping seniors involved in their own financial affairs provides valuable mental stimulation and social interaction," says PDMM Young. "It improves their quality of life, and demonstrates our regard for them, their dignity and their money."

Pat summed it up well when she said, "I just wish younger people would show me more respect!"

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