

RESOURCES

HOW DO I APPROACH MY PARENT(S) ABOUT MOVING TO AN ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITY?

Introducing the topic of assisted living to your aging parent—then having productive conversations about it—may be one of the most difficult things you will do because it can unleash a wide range of intense emotions for both the parent and child. Every parent is different; every parent-child relationship is different; every situation is different. This means there is no specific script to follow that guarantees a happy resolution. The good news is there are many things you can do to increase your chances of successfully introducing and discussing this issue with your parent(s).

UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WANT YOUR PARENTS TO MOVE INTO AN ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITY.

Be very clear with yourself as to why you want your parents to move out of their home into a residence with more assistance. Sometimes in this process, adult children may discover they actually are feeling guilty about not being as available to their parents as they would like. In this situation, moving their parents to a more secure and comfortable environment relieves the child's guilt and offers them peace of mind. In many cases, though, there are indications that the parents would lead a much more fulfilling—and more secure—life if they moved.



WHAT ARE SOME COMMON SIGNS THAT MAY MEAN EXTRA HELP IS NEEDED?

Most likely, you have noticed “something different” about your parent(s). It concerns you enough to consider assisted living as a good option to explore. Changes to be concerned about typically fall into two main categories:

1. **Physical changes.** Sudden weight loss; bruises from falling; reduced personal grooming; increased difficulty with everyday activities, such as cooking, bathing, dressing, etc.
2. **Emotional changes.** Unusual depression, stress, or anxiety; a lack of enthusiasm for normal activities; less contact with friends and family, etc.

When any of these changes put your parents' well-being at risk, assisted living becomes a more urgent option. If the situation isn't urgent, you may want to validate your observations by talking with others who have frequent contact with your parents. For example, it's often helpful to talk with your siblings and get their impressions. Plus, it's best when all the brothers and sisters are aware of the current situation with mom and dad.

WHAT CAN AN ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITY OFFER YOUR PARENTS?

As the name implies, an assisted living community offers assistance and support with the normal tasks of daily living. The goal is to offer a personalized level of care that enables your parents to continue living as independently as possible. It helps them to live a more enriched life than would be possible without that extra support.

Has your parent's vision or physical agility declined? Is it becoming difficult for them to safely negotiate the stairs in their home or get in and out of the tub? Is their social life declining, or are they feeling isolated because they've stopped driving? Perhaps they aren't eating properly because it's harder for them to cook and get groceries. The normal aging process can present many barriers that often can be removed with just a little assistance.

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HERE IS A SAMPLING OF ASSISTANCE THAT IS TYPICALLY OFFERED IN THESE COMMUNITIES:

- Help with bathing and dressing;
- Medical assistance, including taking medications;
- Regular meals and good nutrition;
- Help with light housekeeping, laundry;
- Easy accessibility and accommodations for most physical disabilities;
- Emergency call systems;
- Transportation to medical appointments and shopping.

Most communities also provide ample opportunities for the tenants to socialize and to enhance their physical and spiritual well-being while maintaining their personal privacy.

PREPARE FOR “THE TALK”; DO YOUR HOMEWORK.

Gather as much information as possible ahead of the conversation with your parents. The more you know about this topic, the more prepared you are to articulate your thoughts, answer questions, handle surprises, and maintain a calm and respectful tone. If you are relaxed and confident, your parents will be more apt to respond positively to whatever you present.

To prepare for the discussion, you can check the Internet, contact governmental resources, and visit with other professionals such as health care providers. In short, talk to as many people as you can—physicians, family, friends, senior care experts—and read as much as possible before you approach your parents.

OFFER A TIMEFRAME FOR THE POSSIBLE MOVE.

The best conversation is one that starts early—long before a move is necessary—and offers ample time (perhaps months) for your parents to think about the idea and come to their own decision. Seniors who voluntarily

choose to make the move will be much happier and better adjusted than those who feel they have been rushed or forced into making the decision. If you let your parents know right away that you will not rush them into a decision, they will be more open to the conversation. On the other hand, if you think it is currently unsafe for them to live at home without assistance, then a sense of urgency is appropriate and necessary.

PUT YOURSELF IN YOUR PARENTS’ SHOES.

It would be wonderful if your parents called you one day and said, “You know, honey, we’ve been thinking that it would be a good idea for us to move into an assisted living situation.” But many seniors don’t do that, because the idea of moving from their present home into a place of greater dependence is a paralyzing thought. Consider what they may already be feeling:

- Fear and confusion about their future;
- Fear of losing their independence and sense of identity;
- Grief over losing the family home and downsizing personal possessions;
- Embarrassment of becoming “the child” as you become “the parent”;
- A sense of vulnerability due to circumstances beyond their control;
- Stress, depression, and denial.

If you can see this from your parents’ perspective, you’ll be more sympathetic to their fears and objections and better able to address those. Acknowledging and respecting their feelings will go a long way in gaining their trust and willingness to work toward your common goal of finding a safe and enriching environment for them.

