



CARRIAGE HILL
ASSISTED LIVING

How to Transition My Loved One: A Guide for Family Members

The process of beginning to transition your loved one to an assisted living facility can be a challenging and somewhat overwhelming process. Any type of change and new environment can bring uncertainty and anxiety to both you and your family member. Below you will find some helpful tips on how to approach your loved one as well as other useful information to successfully transition them to an assisted living home.

How to Approach My Loved One: Dos & Don'ts

Do

- Bring up care needs with your loved one early and often. Prepare the person that a time may come when their health and safety needs may not be manageable in the home. If possible try to discuss what they would like in a facility before the move is imminent.
- Continue to affirm the reasons that the move is necessary such as their safety and well-being. Remind them of the positive features of the facility such as single level living, activities, and peers for socialization. Create a pros and cons list to help your loved one visualize and remember the reasons they are moving.
- Include your loved one in the process of choosing a facility even if they do not want to move. Show them pictures, bring them on visits, and ask their preferences on size, location, activities offered, etc.
- Talk and reminisce with loved one about meaningful parts of their life and help them plan how to continue these values in their new environment (i.e. pictures of family/childhood, decor/furniture that can be brought to the facility, hobbies that can be continued).
- If your loved one is resisting the move ask their doctor, nurse, social worker, occupational therapist, and/ or other professionals working with the person to explain the need for increased care and benefits of moving to a facility.
- Encourage your loved one to speak with someone who has gone through a similar situation. Look for

testimonials like the ones found on the Carriage Hill website.

- If you feel that your loved one's mental health is suffering help them to consult with a geriatric psychiatrist before, during, and after the transition. Visit this link for comprehensive information on depression in the geriatric population: <http://www.healthline.com/health/depression/elderly#Treatment5>
- Consider reading through frequently asked questions and other information provided on the facility's website.

Don't

- Be discouraged if their initial response is negative. Moving into an assisted living facility can be a very positive experience and improve quality of life for you and your loved one, BUT it is important to remember that they are losing a level of independence and it is important for them to be able to process this loss in order to adjust to their new living situation. Listen and validate your loved one's feelings even if they are negative.
- Avoid talking about the move. It is important that your loved one to process their emotions and mentally prepare themselves for the move if at all possible. Give your loved one time to digest the information.
- Disregard the timing and environment where you have these discussions. The older adult should not be distracted or preoccupied, irritable, or nervous.

- Even if you are the legal guardian of your loved one, don't drop them off at a facility without discussing it with them first. If they have an aversive response to talking about transitioning, continue to bring it up and help them process their emotions. If memory or cognition is a factor, simplify your message as much as possible for example: "This is your new home. You are safe here."
- If your loved one has dementia or other impairments with memory or cognition, don't forget to make sure that they remember and understand what is happening on the day that they move.

How to Cope with Guilt During the Transition Process

Transitioning your loved one to an assisted living facility (ALF) includes the transfer of care from yourself to health care professionals. Guilt is a common feeling families experience after making this difficult decision. Every case is personal and unique, however there are some common reasons for this guilt that many people share. These include: feelings that you did not do enough for your loved one, feeling that you have broken a promise or a commitment to them, or feeling guilty because your loved one was resistant to the change. Listed below are strategies that can help you to alleviate and cope with these feelings of guilt.

Strategies to Relieve Guilt:

- Remind yourself that this was a difficult decision and you likely did not come to it lightly.
- Speak/reach out to other family members for support.
- Talk to your loved one about how you are feeling.
- Continue to actively participate in your loved one's life- whether this includes seeing them in person or communicating over the phone, mail, or email.
- Keep your loved one up to date on life events within your family.
- During a visit, plan an outing to change the environment and engage in an activity.
- Connect with others who might be experiencing a similar situation. Maybe you know someone in your personal life you can talk to or you can reach out to other family members at your loved one's new home.

After the Transition

It is important to understand that transitioning to an ALF may cause a major change in many areas of your family member's daily life, which can contribute to increased stress and decreased well-being. Consider the following factors which may support an easier transition for your family member:

- **Social Support:** Research has shown that for those living in an ALF, well-being relates to social support. When social connections are made within the ALF, your family member may feel more settled into the ALF as his/her home. Encourage attendance at activities, outings, and events!
- **Roles, Tasks, and Hobbies:** Maintaining meaningful roles after moving to an ALF may contribute to a more successful transition. If your mother sees herself as an artist, a friend, and a teacher, she does not have to give up these roles because she is no longer living in her home. The same applies for hobbies and other daily tasks. Remind your loved one of the importance of incorporating meaningful daily activities from the past into his/her new routine!
- **Choice:** If possible, including your family member in choosing an ALF will allow him/her to feel more in control and having a sense of control over one's life is essential to overall well-being. Also, look for small ways in which

your family member can maintain choice over his/her daily routine, such as what time they wake up in the morning, when they go to bed, when they eat breakfast, time of day they have a shower/how many times a week, if they want facility or family to do laundry.

- **Communication:** Talking to staff members, family, and other residents is a critical part of a successful transition.

Remind your loved one that despite experiencing the aging process and having to leave home, he/she is still capable and worthy of living with dignity, partaking in hobbies and interests, creating new connections with others, and experiencing an overall high quality of life throughout his/her elderly years.

Your Role

Now that loved one has moved into a home where he/she is safe and cared for, what is your role? The following is a list of tips for maintaining your role as a supportive family member:

- Help your family member personalize his/her space, as familiar furniture, photos, and other possessions will help a place to feel more homelike and comfortable.
- Have a discussion with your family member about how often they would like you to visit and how often you can visit. It may be helpful to set weekly time(s) for visits, as consistency can alleviate feeling of uncertainty that may accompany a transition.
- Look for family inclusive activities that you may attend or find something to work on together. Continue something that you have always done together or pick up a new hobby!
- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of depression, as mental health problems may occur if a transition is not going well. Visit this link for comprehensive information on depression in the geriatric population: <http://www.healthline.com/health/depression/elderly#Treatment5>

Communicate information about your family member to staff, which may include: their work and family history, daily routine/habits, valued hobbies, interests, and roles, favorite foods, culture, skills and abilities, areas of difficulty, mental health concerns, and hopes for the future.

Additional Resources

Alzheimer's Association. (2005). *Telling a person that they need long-term nursing home - care consultation*. Retrieved from: http://www.alz.org/maryland/documents/telling_a_person_that_they_need_long_term_care.pdf
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Krans, B. (2012, Sept 4). Geriatric depression: depression in the elderly. Retrieved from <http://www.healthline.com/health/depression/elderly#Treatment5>

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This document was created through a collaboration with residents, family members and the staff of Carriage Hill.

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