

# Assisted Living:

## 7 Strategies for Helping Your Parent Manage the Transition

### Do You See Your Parents' Health Declining?

The signs are there, although you may have tried to deny them. If your parents, once healthy and vibrant retirees, are slowing down, and you don't believe they can age in place safely, it could be time to talk with them about a transition to an assisted living community. We offer the following 7 strategies for navigating that conversation and next steps.

1. How to Start the Conversation
2. Have Multiple Conversations
3. How to Narrow the List
4. What to Look for in a Community
5. What to Expect After the Move
6. When to Visit
7. Advocate for Your Parent's Care

#### 1. How to Start the Conversation

When you visit, do you see the parents who you've known all your life—or do you see a more limited version of themselves? If you're seeing notable changes, it's likely time to begin the discussion that eventually will lead to moving them to an assisted living community.

It's natural to want to put off the discussion with your parents about age-related changes you've observed and how best to address them. Broaching this subject can be emotionally fraught, for children and parents alike. To help you overcome any anxiety you may be feeling, there are ways to initiate the conversation in a loving and supporting way.

Rather than saying, for example, "Dad, I saw a pile of unpaid bills on your desk," or "Mom, I noticed you

haven't gardened lately"—remarks that could result in a defensive response or your parents shrugging it off—start by asking open-ended questions about how they are doing or what concerns they may have. It's important to listen with patience and respect and to put their feelings first.

It may be that one of your parents has passed away, and, for example, your mom is living alone and needing to move out of a larger home into an assisted living community where she will share meals with others, have help with laundry and oversight for taking medications.



## 2. Have Multiple Conversations

Keep in mind that, barring a sudden and serious health issue that forces a move, the conversation may be better received if it's approached as a series of conversations over months. This will help allay your parent's fears and give her time to feel that it's a decision she has arrived at with you. It's important for her to feel empowered about making choices.

If, however, your parent shows signs of declining cognitive abilities, you may find yourself making the decision for her. In that case, when she moves, you can help by making sure her assisted living apartment has familiar furniture, family photos, lamps and other items that will remind her of home. And then make a plan to visit with a frequency you are both comfortable with, so she doesn't feel abandoned while adjusting to a new home.

## 3. How to Narrow the List

Before touring any facilities, help your mom narrow down the list by asking her what is most important to her. Are the features of the living space, such as a small kitchen area, a top priority? Are there music programs, art lessons, exercise classes, day trips for shopping, museum-going and the like among the activities offered?

Look at the websites of facilities in the area your mom wants to live. In addition, you should be able to find a senior living navigator in your city—this is a person trained and certified to provide personal guidance throughout the process. If you don't live in the same city as your parent, a navigator can be a helpful resource.

If your mom is mentally able and willing, she should be able to choose a community that feels right to her. If she isn't able to make these decisions, you know her well and can make a better judgment as to the right fit once you visit several facilities.

## 4. What to Look for in a Community

Assisted living options available today typically offer apartments of varying sizes, a shared dining area, media room and an outdoor recreational area. For those seeking a more "resort-style" experience, amenities may include chef-prepared meals and room service, spa and salon services, a fitness center, indoor swimming pool and community theater.

### What to Observe When You Visit:

- **Overall layout of the facility.** Consider the facility's common areas, both inside and out, as well as the spaces designated for dining and socializing. Some communities are large, and your mom could feel lost, while others have smaller floor plans, which she might prefer.
- **Staff-to-resident ratio and experience and training of staff.** Acquaint yourself with the staff who will be providing your parents with 24/7 care and, if possible, assess their empathy, responsiveness and patience. Ask how many certified nursing assistants (CNAs) there are per resident and about the range of tasks they'll perform.
- **Community culture and amenities.** Talk to the staff and visit the facility when an activity is going on to observe how engaged and happy the residents seem to be. That will help give you a sense of the community's culture and whether the facility would be a good fit for your parent.
- **Cafeteria options.** Add lunch with a staff member to your tour agenda if possible. Find out if the menu changes daily, if food is freshly prepared every day and whether special dietary needs can be met.

This list isn't intended to be all-inclusive, so you should do your own research and prepare for assisted living community visits.





## 5. What to Expect After the Move

Despite the thorough planning you and your parent have undertaken to ensure a comfortable transition to an assisted living community, this is a life-changing move—and change involves stress and disruption to routines and the people, places and things your parent holds dear.

This change might trigger stress for you, as well. You may be tempted to second-guess your decision, which could cause you to feel guilty. Hopefully, you are able to take comfort in knowing that at every step along the way, you prioritized your parent's interests and needs above your own.

## 6. When to Visit

In the meantime, give it time. On average, it takes between three and six months for residents to adjust to assisted living, according to experts. During those early weeks, visit as often as you believe is necessary to smooth your parent's transition. One parent may prefer frequent visits, while another may want the time to make new connections with other residents. Either way, encourage family members and friends who were part of your parent's independent life to visit, too. Familiar faces could go a long way to easing any discomfort your mom may be feeling.

Don't be surprised if, just when you think that your mom has acclimated to her new surroundings and life, you receive a phone call from the assisted living staff telling you that she is unhappy and wants to go home. Expect setbacks like this from time to time. Rather than reminding her of all the positive aspects of her new community, listen to her fears and acknowledge those feelings. Being heard will help her work through any sense of sadness and loss of her previous life that she may be feeling.

## 7. Advocate for Your Parent

Finally—and perhaps most importantly—be your parent's advocate and oversee her care. Form an alliance with the care team and share any of your or your parent's concerns. Ask them to take special notice of your mom's daily routine and activities to make sure she feels supported and that the integration into a new community is successful. Meet with the nurse and ask to see your mom's medication list to ensure you understand what she's taking and can convey that information when you meet with her doctors.

## We Can Help

At Mariner Wealth Advisors, we understand how difficult the assisted living conversation—as well as the eventual transition—with a parent can be. As your wealth team, we're here to help you with all of life's transitions, including listening and offering advice as you and your parent navigate this major life-changing event.



**For more information visit: [marinerwealthadvisors.com](https://marinerwealthadvisors.com)**

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