



HELPFUL HINTS

Choosing an Assisted Living Facility

Overview

One important alternative to hiring in-home care is Assisted Living, which offers the benefits of both being in a community setting, and having staff available around the clock to help. Services typically include dining, wellness and social activities, personal care, medication management, and more. It helps older adults enjoy a lifestyle that allows for independence, dignity, and social involvement, with the benefit of assistance to meet their daily needs.

HELPFUL HINTS: Choosing an Assisted Living Facility, prepared in collaboration with the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC), will provide families with issues to think about and steps to take if they are considering Assisted Living Facilities as a long-term care option.

Key Considerations

1. Assess your needs

Assisted living is an option to be considered when your family member is no longer able to manage alone at home, but does not need the skilled medical attention that a nursing facility would provide. For example, after taking a fall, you may find that the older adult becomes more anxious about walking, isolated, depressed, less able to manage daily activities, or has a cognitive problem that puts him or her at risk. These may be indicators that living alone is no longer a safe option.

2. Compare different settings

Depending on where you live, you may find smaller residences that offer a room in a traditional home or larger residences that offer apartments with central dining and recreation areas. What type of setting would your family member prefer, and does it meet his or her needs? Bigger does not always mean better and small does not confirm that your family member will receive more care. It will be important whenever possible to involve your loved one in the decision, since moving to a new living environment is a major life change.

3. Consider special care needs

If your family member has a particular physical or cognitive need, determine whether the setting can accommodate it. For example, for individuals who have Alzheimer's disease you will need to find an assisted living facility that has a dedicated staff who provide supervision for personal safety, and specialize in the care of individuals who have memory loss. You will want to evaluate whether the environment allows for freedom of movement, while protecting individuals from wandering.

4. Seek out recommendations

Seek recommendations and referrals from doctors, friends, and other community agencies. The Assisted Living Federation of America (ALFA) (www.alfa.org) provides a list of the agencies that belong to their organization. You may also reach ALFA by phone at (703) 894-1805. Your state's Long Term Care Ombudsman's office will also be a source of information on the quality of

the assisted living facilities in your area. See www.ltombudsman.org or call (202)332-2275 to obtain an ombudsman in your state.

5. *Take your time to evaluate*

As with any decision, it is better to make it when you have time to explore all the options. By making visits to a facility at various times, you and your loved one will be able to observe how different staff interact with the residents, whether the meals are appetizing and prepared to accommodate dietary needs, and whether there are scheduled activities that will meet your loved one's social needs.

6. *Understand the payment arrangements and contract*

The cost for an assisted living community can vary dramatically. It is important to understand what is included in the base rate and what charges are extra, such as transportation, additional personal care, or housekeeping. Be sure to ask about billing, bed reservations, refunds, and payments. Ask for written material including copies of the resident's agreement that covers services, prices, extra charges, admission and discharge criteria, staffing and house rules.

7. *Know the procedures for getting medical care*

You will want to know what services and systems are in place to provide your loved one with adequate healthcare oversight, monitoring, and access to emergency medical care. How often do the residents get health care monitoring? What transportation is available to assist residents with getting to their doctors? What are the procedures for getting emergency medical attention? Is there a therapeutic exercise or fitness program?

8. *Making the transition successfully*

With any move, there is always a period of adjustment. Give your family member time, and stay involved and visible in his or her life. Learn the names of the person(s) to contact for giving and getting information about your family member. Be sure to praise good work and show appreciation to the staff. Find out the procedures for sharing your concerns, and don't be afraid to speak up when you see a change that concerns you. Individuals whose families are involved in a positive way generally have higher morale and receive better care.

To Learn More

Available at www.maturemarketinstitute.com is the guide *Choosing Assisted Living* in the *Since You Care*® series. To obtain a copy of this guide, which includes tools for caregivers and a listing of resources, search under "All Publications" and select "Since You Care guides" from the drop down menu.

To receive a hard copy of the guide please email a request to the MetLife Mature Market Institute at maturemarketinstitute@metlife.com or write to MetLife Mature Market Institute, 57 Greens Farms Road, Westport, CT 06880.



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National Alliance for Caregiving

Established in 1996, the National Alliance for Caregiving, www.caregiving.org, is a nonprofit coalition of national organizations that focuses on issues of family caregiving across the life span. The Alliance was created to conduct research, do policy analysis, develop national programs, and increase public awareness of family caregiving issues.

