

The Move to Long Term Care - Keeping Connected and Making it Home For Your Loved One
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When it has been determined that the best, safest place for the one you love is a long term care facility, a family will face a wave of different emotions. While this can be a wrenching decision, it does not have to be disastrous. Far from shattering family bonds, it can be a time of true and loving connections.

You have, of course, chosen the place that is the best fit for your parent or family member. Your first step is to develop an understanding of the operation of the facility. How many shifts are there in a day? Is laundry done on site or off? Is there any kind of orientation done for new residents and their families? Is there any literature to back up what you are told, in case you forget? Use the facility's administrators as a resource. Ask them: what are the most important things I need to know in keeping my loved one comfortable here? Add another question: if you lived here, what are the most important things you would want your family to know to keep your bonds close?

The next most important step: get to know the nurses and the staff. These are usually dedicated and experienced professionals who are committed to taking the best care of their patients. The best ones love having family members involved and welcome input. Talk to them. Tell them about your relative and what they were like in their everyday life. It really helps the staff get a feel for the whole person they are caring for. This is especially crucial if your loved one is no longer verbal. Don't limit yourself to the clinical staff. Make a point of saying hello to the workers who deliver meals, who do maintenance, who work in the office. These are people who will be an important part of your relative's new life. A long-term care facility is a community.

It can be challenging to know what to bring from home. Work together on this. Your loved one knows best what they want or need, but they may be unable to tell you or they may feel overwhelmed. They will want to bring mementos from home, but never bring anything valuable. Familiar afghans, shawls, nightclothes are all things that help the new home *be* home. Obviously also pictures, photo albums and books are also comforting objects. Their favorite scented lotion or powder is a necessity, along with their standard toiletries.

A bulletin board is nice because it can have displays of photos rotated. Supply a calendar. Even if you think your family member is not aware of current time, it is an orienting object.

More than things, your loved one will cherish time you share with them. To say visit as often as possible is both trite and onerous at the same time. One person cannot do it all, so try to arrange a schedule. Elderly facility residents are very comforted by routine. Enlist the assistance of your extended family. Family members are invaluable when the primary caregiver has to be absent for some reason.

Early visits may be awkward or painful. Acknowledging that helps, but also try to keep a positive perspective. This is a place where your loved one is safe. Nothing is more important. If your family member is capable, talk about it together. Even if not, still talk to them. Tell them

you love them and they will always be cared for. A simple calming tone of voice can be a gift of soothing.

Look at your visits as your continued relationship, simply in a new place. Do the things together you have always loved. Give family updates, bring new pictures. Talk about the 'outside' world, about news, current events, new trends. Life does and should continue to go on and your loved one deserves to be included in it.

If you find that you are still uncertain about this life change and what it means to and for your family, the assistance of a professional can be especially helpful. A Professional Geriatric Care Manager is an excellent resource. A Geriatric Care Manager is a health care professional who is committed to supporting older adults and their families in maintaining independence, dignity and quality of life. Utilizing their training, knowledge and extensive experience, a Care Manager can assist you all with planning and organizing many elements of life changes.

While long-term care is a difficult decision, there are many, many ways to keep your lives loving and connected.

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