

How to Discuss Moving with an Aging Relative or Friend

No one likes to think about, much less discuss, moving to an assisted living or long-term care facility. It's difficult for the senior, the family and even friends as they face the possibility of a substantial life change.

While each situation is different, openly discussing one's preferences can bring peace of mind to all involved.

If you're thinking of having this conversation with a loved one, consider the following points to facilitate a more positive and productive conversation.

- **The earlier, the better.** It's much easier to discuss this sensitive topic when emotions and stress aren't running high. By starting the conversation before you need to, you can be more proactive and rational. Putting it off to another day can complicate matters as "what if" becomes "right now." While not everyone has the luxury of time, try to start the conversation as early as possible and revisit it over time as your situation changes.
- **Be reassuring.** Facing a loss of independence can leave older adults feeling vulnerable. Acknowledge your loved one's feelings and validate the difficulty of such a transition. Reassure them that it's a normal part of aging.
- **Ask questions.** From practical to deep, find out their needs, wants and resources. Talk about what having a good quality of life means to them in their later years. Find out where they keep their insurance contracts and who handles their will/estate documents. Ask where they keep a lockbox and if they have medical directives in place.
- **Listen.** Families tend to go into "fix it" mode, making decisions and trying to convince their loved ones to follow a certain course of action, which can stir up feelings of anger and hurt. Make sure you understand their wishes. Talk with them, not at them.
- **Research.** It's helpful to know what options are available beforehand. Tour different facilities; find out about medical insurance coverage; look into home health and companion services; talk with other family members or friends to get another perspective. Just be sure it comes across as informative and supportive, not like you are trying to control the conversation.
- **Be supportive throughout.** Think of this as an ongoing dialogue rather than a single conversation. It's a process — one that people need to think about carefully. If they want you to, accompany them on tours or appointments with healthcare professionals, financial planners and other advisors as they explore the idea of such a transition.

"The best thing families can do is talk openly about options and resources. The earlier you can start having those conversations, the better. The process takes time to work through the emotions, options and details."

Kristen Martin, Sales Specialist and Social Worker, Meadowlark

"By having these difficult conversations, you'll learn about your loved one's preferences and be better equipped to honor their wishes."

Annie Peace, Health Services Director, Meadowlark



Many older adults feel threatened by the prospect of losing control. Talking with them is a first step in understanding their wishes and letting them know you respect their perspective.