

When it's Finally Time for Residential Placement

After years of caring for your family member at home, the time has finally come for full time facility care. You have reached the point at which you realize you can no longer provide care 24-hours per day. Your health may be suffering, your loved one's needs may have increased and now their name is on the waiting list for a residential bed.

Add to all this, the uncertainty of not knowing exactly when a bed may be offered – it may be a couple of weeks or up to 6 months or more. Not knowing is a problem because it is difficult to plan ahead and prepare yourself for the transition. While there is little that can be done to ease this “up in the air” feeling, when you are waiting for the “system” to inform you about where and when a placement will be available, there are some practical things that you can do to prepare yourself and your family member. When the facility phones to offer the bed, you generally have 48 hours to accept the placement and move in. There are many things to think about so planning ahead can make your life much easier.

Make a list of important contact people and phone numbers: Who do you need to notify once the move happens - family, friends, pension offices, etc? Who will be paying the bills? Who does the care facility call if you are out of town? Have the phone numbers and addresses handy when they do the admission. You will also need the care recipient's Care Card, birth date, Power of Attorney and Health Care Representative. Having this information readily available will save a lot of time and running around at the last minute.

Build your support system: Let family members and friends know what is happening. Can someone help you on the day of the move in? Are there others who can share the responsibilities and tasks that are involved? Letting people know in advance helps to prepare everyone for the change. Some family members may find it more difficult to accept the fact that residential care is now the best option.

Write down some background information for the care facility to put in the file: It is always helpful for them to know a little bit about your loved one – who they are and what they do in their life, such as accomplishments, education, where they lived, family, favorite pets and hobbies. This can be helpful to staff in getting to know your relative as well as giving them cues for conversations.

Also include information that you think the staff need to know so that they can provide better care. Is there a time of day when your family member becomes agitated? Do they hate being approached from behind? Do they have hearing problems? How is their eyesight? This information is invaluable in helping your relative to settle in.

Pack a bag: Each facility is slightly different in their admission procedures and their list of suggested belongings to bring. Many will provide you with a list and will be very helpful in figuring out what will work best. In general, plan for 4 - 5 complete outfits –

one to be worn, another waiting to be laundered, one in the laundry and one to change into if accidents occur. Try to plan for clothing that is easy to put on and washable. Don't forget slippers and a sturdy pair of shoes. Take their personal toiletries. Label items as they can be easily confused with other people's belongings. Closet space will be limited.

Having a suitcase made up with the immediate essentials will make the move easier. You can include a few photos to make the surroundings more familiar, but initially don't worry too much about taking furniture. It's better to get a feel for the room and space and see what is needed, rather than trying to bring everything the first day.

Think about how your life will be different: How will you manage the time alone? Initially you may find yourself sleeping a lot – just one indication of the exhaustion you have been coping with and the stress you have been under. What will you do to look after yourself? Plan to do some of the activities you “haven't had time for” when you were providing care at home.

Have realistic expectations: Adjustment to placement takes at least 6 weeks and often 3 months before everyone gets used to the routines and changed environment. The staff need time to get to know you. You have to figure out how things work, your new role and how to provide care with a relative in a facility.

These are just a few things to consider but will generally help you to prepare for the move. The challenges that you face once you have made the decision and the difficulty in following through will be one of the hardest things to do. Emotionally you may struggle with “have I made the right decision?” and it can be a time of great angst. You often can feel guilty and struggle over this, but in the long run you will be able to spend more quality time with your family member rather than becoming exhausted with providing daily care. You are still a family caregiver, but your role is changing too. People often find that after the initial settling in period the quality of their relationship with their family member improves and that they can enjoy the time together more.

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