

How to Choose the Right Retirement Home

The following information provides the recommended steps that a family should consider when choosing a retirement home:

Step 1

Talk with your loved one (or loved ones if it is a couple) first and involve them as much as possible in the decision.

Step 2

Consider the cost of these facilities and gain an understanding of your loved one's financial position. Review your loved one's assets and prepare a budget to determine their affordability. Benefits such as Medicaid, other private health insurances may cover part of the care, but you should plan for it in advance, as it may take months to obtain approval. Veterans of America does offer aid and assistance benefits (including spouses of veterans). Check the VA Website to see if your loved one is eligible to receive funds: www.veteransforamerica.org.

Step 3

Ask your loved one's physician for reputable and recommended facilities in the area. Research the Web and personally visit other retirement. Some retirement homes will cover everything needed, while others require you to pay extra for certain services, such as night care or private rooms. Your local department of Senior Services should also be able to provide a list of retirement homes.

Step 4

Make an unannounced visit at the facility to gather brochures and pricing information. Is the facility clean and odor-free? Is the staff approachable and happy to see you? Remember to write down your observations immediately after leaving the facility as you will reflect back on your notes when narrowing down your list.

Step 5

Create a checklist of questions for the retirement homes and review with your loved one to determine their priorities on the list. Schedule in-person appointments and personal tours with the facilities on your short list.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

- ❖ Is the location appealing?
- ❖ Are the building and grounds well maintained?
- ❖ Are the common areas clean and inviting?
- ❖ Is the floor plan easy to understand (location of dining room, social gathering areas)?

- ❖ How many residents can the facility accommodate?
- ❖ What types of rooms does the facility offer (independent apartments, private, semi-private, couples, private baths, etc.)?
- ❖ Are safety precautions taken to reduce the occurrence of falls (e.g., handrails, no-slip tread on stairs, secured area rugs, safety bars in bathrooms, etc.)?
- ❖ Are staff members trained, professional and friendly?
- ❖ Is there a care plan for each resident (diet, exercise, hygiene, activities, health issues)?
- ❖ Are staff members available 24 hours a day to provide assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs): medication management, dressing, grooming, bathing, toileting, mobility, incontinence, eating, shopping, laundry, and using the telephone?
- ❖ What is the ratio of caregivers to residents during the day and evening hours?
- ❖ Does a physician or registered nurse visit residents on a regular basis ?
- ❖ What types of social activities (both in-house and off-site) are available to residents and how often?
- ❖ Are visits with your loved one welcome at any time?
- ❖ Request a daily schedule or calendar.
- ❖ Do volunteers come into the facility to assist with activities and programs? What is the facility'?
- ❖ Is transportation provided for medical appointments?
- ❖ Are housekeeping (including laundry) and transportation services available?
- ❖ Are three meals provided every day seven days a week? Do menus vary from day to day?
- ❖ Are snacks and beverages available throughout the day?
- ❖ Is the menu overseen by a licensed dietician?
- ❖ Are meal accommodations made for special diets?
- ❖ Is there a contractual agreement detailing all services, fees, and admission and discharge policies (e.g., additional costs for private telephone, cable, haircuts, personal care products)?
- ❖ Is respite care available?
- ❖ Ask about emergency procedures and plans.
- ❖ Ask for references.

[These questions were adapted from the checklist provided by the Assisted Living Federation of America (ALFA). Visit www.alfa.org for more information and checklist questions.]

Step 6

Visit the “short list” facilities with your loved one, and with other family members that are involved in the decision.

Review and compare all the information that you have gathered with other family members involved in the decision and rate the facilities based on your interviews and tours. Note: Respite care is an effective way of testing the facility out before making a final decision.

Step 7

Prepare your loved one for the upcoming changes in their life, and reassure them of this transition as this will be a time of anxiety and uncertainty.

Step 8

After a facility has been chosen and the contracts have been signed, help your loved one decorate their new room with familiar furniture, photos and belongings. This will help ease their move into a new environment and lifestyle.

Step 9

Be sure to schedule time with your loved one both on and off-site to reassure them that you are still there for them even though they are in a different living arrangement. Keeping a calendar in their room is a good way of reminding them when you were there and when you will be there next. Bring your camera and capture new memories and moments to reminisce over with your loved one.

Step 10

Drop by the facility in surprise fashion to make sure your loved one is receiving proper care and attention. Are they adjusting well to the change? Do they look and sound well to you (skin and eye color, responsiveness, balance, walking, appetite...)? Inspect their room, bathroom (if applicable), clothing, etc. Continue to be your loved one’s advocate.

For more information please visit www.WestWindManor.com

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