

LIFE IN A NURSING HOME
WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOUR LOVED ONE ADJUST?
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You have made the decision to place your loved one in a nursing home. You have chosen what you hope will be the best possible substitute for what they know as home. Now, steps in reality, or the adjustment time.

Adjusting to nursing home placement is not what you expected, or what your loved one expected it to be. It can be a difficult time for both of you. You must adjust to the restrictions placed on you, and you need to adjust to your new feelings. Your loved one needs to adjust to their new surroundings, new faces, new routines, and most importantly, their loss of complete independence. Be prepared for the unexpected feelings and emotions you may experience, but be especially prepared, and accepting of, the feelings and emotions expressed by your loved one. You are their link to adjusting positively to the recent change in their life.

Suggestions to remember as your loved one, and you, adjust to this new placement may be:

HAVE PATIENCE: There is really no way to tell how long it will take for someone to adjust to a move into a nursing home. I usually tell families that a good adjustment can take about six months, although if there are exceptional issues; i.e., roommate difficulties, and/or medical problems, it may take up to a year or more. It is important to remember to give your loved one plenty of time and space. Allow them the opportunity to voice their opinions, complaints, and questions. It is not always the family's duty to resolve each and every issue raised. Just the simple act of listening and giving the person lots of time to adjust can be most helpful.

SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE: These two words are commonly used by nursing home personnel. They are what the staff tries to provide for each resident every day. Support can be shown by giving positive feedback, praise, and reinforcement. Recognize, and acknowledge each accomplishment with enthusiasm. Encourage them to continue looking forward to something meaningful, try to get them involved, in whatever capacity they can, and encourage them to participate in their own behalf, to the best of their ability.

SEPARATE YOUR FEELINGS FROM THEIRS: Placing a family member in a nursing home is usually a very stressful event. Feelings of guilt, sadness, resentment, hopelessness, and fear can be overwhelming. Try to acknowledge the difference between your feelings and those of your loved one. Leave your thoughts and concerns at the door when visiting, and listen to what your loved one is conveying. Be mindful of how your actions and disposition may influence the overall adjustment process. If you find that you are really struggling with this decision and adjustment, consider attending a family support group meeting. Many nursing homes now offer this service through the Social Service Department to provide extra support for families.

STAY INVOLVED/BE INFORMED: Familiarize yourself with the routines of the nursing facility. Get to know the staff, from the nursing department to the cook. Who is in charge of the laundry? Who is planning the recreational activities and what are they? Each resident of a nursing home has a written care plan - a list of problems and goals that every staff member works to attain. Ask to have it read to you, and become familiar with it. Attend the meetings, held quarterly, that review these care plans. Try to visit during an activity, and attend with your family member. Most homes offer activities during the evenings and weekends to encourage family involvement. The more you know, the less anxious you may feel.

TEAM APPROACH: Every department in a nursing facility works together to provide the best comprehensive care for each of its residents. Consider yourself part of the team. When problems arise,

which they will, work together to resolve them. Lack of communication and information, can be the heart of many conflicts. Try to view the nurses and nurses's aides who care for your family member, as co-workers. They see your loved one every day and become involved in their care. Work together to promote the highest quality of care available.

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN: Give your family member every opportunity possible to voice their opinions, questions, and concerns. Try not to argue with their perceptions of how they view their new environment. Instead, listen and try to acknowledge how they feel. Having someone who loves and understands them available to listen, can help relieve the stress and anxiety that they may be feeling.

BRING THINGS FROM HOME: Depending on the size of the room, special items from home can make their room a comforting place. Personal comforters, handmade Afghans, pillows, a rocking chair or recliner, and bureaus are common belongings that are welcomed. Pictures - many of them are great! Especially pictures from long ago; their parents and siblings, photos of them in their youth and early adulthood, wedding pictures, and vacations. These photos can be helpful if your family member has any form of dementia, for it is the memories from long ago they hold onto the longest. Also, photographs can inspire dialogue between roommates and any other residents or staff who may visit. Try to create a homelike atmosphere as realistic as possible.

DON'T LOSE YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR: Yes, nursing home placement is difficult. But nursing homes have come a long way. They are brighter, cheerier, and warmer then ever. Laughter can go a long way to alleviate the stress. Look for the opportunities to laugh, and do so. The daily atmosphere of a nursing home is usually quite busy and energized. It is not always a somber place, though these moments do remain. Life does go on here, the ability to laugh should remain a part of it.

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