



Transitioning to Facility Care -By Cassandra Van Dyck

Perhaps one of the hardest decisions you will make as a family caregiver is the decision to transition your care partner to facility care. You may feel awash with emotions, from grief and fear, to possible relief. It can be an incredibly difficult time that might leave you feeling overwhelmed, but there are things you can do and people you can talk to that can make the decision making and transition easier on you and your care partner.

Many caregivers wait to discuss transitioning to facility care until well past when they first started thinking about it because it can be a hard conversation to have. There might be fears about how care partners may react or how caregivers might cope once their partners are no longer with them. Ideally, the care partner participates in the decision making process. Having choice creates control, which can be comforting when someone feels like that might be taken away from them. "If [they] refuse or are unable," says Peter S. Silin, "Then you will have to make the decision. Think about the decision as one you need to have in order to make a different decision together." Silin suggests that caregivers be very clear about what and where you're talking about. Is it a nursing home? Assisted living? A professional caregiver at home? You have reached a point when you feel you can no longer provide your partner the care they need and you are trying to find a solution that will work for both of you. Your care partner may very well feel angry, but it's important to remember that anger is a secondary emotion - it always stems from an underlying, uncomfortable feeling

They may be feeling sad, rejected or scared. It can be helpful to remember that although these emotions are directed towards you, they are not about you. Try to validate their feelings so you can really hear them and understand one another in the best way possible.

After the conversations have been had and the decisions have been made, the next challenging step is to help your loved one adjust to facility care. As we all know, moving is seldom easy, even in ideal situations. Below are some tips to help ease the transition. It is by no means a complete list. These pointers will focus on supporting your care partner with the move, but it is also important to think about details, such as preparing for facility restrictions (non-smoking, etc.), deciding on a Power of Attorney, talking to your physician about the kind of intervention they're able to provide, etc. For more information on preparation and adjustment, please see the resources listed at the end of the article.

Some Things to Bring With You (Keystone Eldercare Solutions)

- Loose-fitting, washable clothing and shoes that fit well with non-skid soles
- Favourite pictures, TV (optional), a few albums, music, CD player, favourite pillow or blanket
- Copies of all of the completed legal and financial documents

- Your family member's calendar of upcoming appointments
- Current list of medications
- Advanced Health Care Directives & Degrees of Intervention

Some Ideas to Help Ease the Transition (Keystone Eldercare Solutions/Kerry McPhedran)

- Bring the old home environment into the new space as much as possible
- Where possible, maintain established routines, i.e., coffee out with friends, subscription to daily paper, etc.
- Reassure, reassure, reassure! Tell your family member that you are here with them, and that they are safe.
- Listen to the emotion as well as their words. First, listen quietly. When they have finished speaking, just say whichever fits: "That must be very up-setting/frustrating/worrying/frightening for you." The person will often say, "Yes it is." Their shoulders relax, the scowl is gone, the anxiety in the eyes lessens." Try it with other residents, too.
- Always bring a small gift. A local newspaper, cookies, chocolate bar, a recent photograph, pens and pencils, a notepad.
- Accept that "No!" means no. The resident's only form of control now is to say "No." We all need to feel empowered sometimes. Accept what you are told.

Kerry McPhedran reminds caregivers and care partners that it can take at least three months to settle in. Remember, it is a huge adjustment for your care partner, but also for yourself. Find someone to talk to if you are struggling and practice self-care regularly.

Here are a few resources for tips on preparing for and transitioning to facility care:

Nursing Homes and Assisted Living: The Family's Guide to Making Decisions and Getting Good Care. Peter S. Silin

Talking to Alzheimer's. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Keystone Eldercare Solutions: www.keystoneeldercare.com