
Long-term care Conversation Checklist for families and seniors

Having a conversation about long-term care with an aging loved one can be difficult. Initiating a conversation can be awkward or uncomfortable for family members or caregivers. We offer the following hints that may help to begin a conversation about housing options with your loved one.

1. Determine if it's time to think about long term care assistance.

Reasons to seek long-term care vary from person to person. In addition to potentially offering a more comfortable and safer environment for the aging loved one, long-term care may be necessary for the mental and physical health of the caregiver.

To ensure your loved one is able to consider their options without a feeling of confrontation, introduce alternate housing options as early as possible- even before necessary. Ask your loved one questions about lifestyle or health-related challenges to introduce the idea that either a home health provider or a senior housing facility may be a positive choice. Continue the conversation over time by sharing your observations and concerns, including any of the physical or mental changes you may have noticed.

2. Remain sensitive to your loved one's needs.

Discussing long-term care may be intimidating for you, but it is a difficult topic for your loved one as well. Since any decisions that are made will affect them the most, it's crucial to respect their needs and preferences.

- Involve your loved one in as many discussions and meetings as possible, barring any health restrictions. Being left out of a family meeting or doctor's conference call could foster feelings of exclusion or distrust.
- Allow time for your loved one to adjust to the idea. If there are no immediate health risks, look to your loved one to set the pace for the discussions.
- Make an effort to find solutions that will work for everyone involved. For example, if your loved one feels strongly about maintaining a garden in a new home, expand your search for facilities that would be able to provide gardening opportunities.

3. Schedule a family meeting.

A family meeting can move the topic of long-term care to a more focused discussion that can lead to a plan. If your loved one agrees, here is a checklist for planning your family meeting:

- Determine the family members that should be involved directly or indirectly in decision making. This may include extended family members, close friends or paid caregivers. Always include the person if he/she is capable of taking part in any decision making.
- Consider including an independent third party to play the role of mediator. This could be a minister or other member of the clergy, a social worker or case manager.
- If necessary, find a neutral place to hold the meeting.
- Prepare an agenda to help you stay focused. It may include:
 - A medical update
 - Sharing of feelings about the illness and caregiving
 - Daily caregiving needs
 - Financial concerns
 - Who will make decisions
 - What support role each person will play
 - What support the primary caregiver needs
 - Next steps moving forward

4. Continue to involve family.

- The move to a long-term care facility is an immense transition for any family, so it's important to involve everyone relevant to the person.
- Reach out to siblings to secure their input and support. For example, share online information about long-term care facilities to secure greater involvement and participation.
- Is there an unequal financial or time burden to one family member? If so, acknowledge the distribution of resources and discuss a strategy for achieving a balance that appeals to everyone.

5. Continue to engage your parent or loved one.

- Have ongoing conversations at times when your loved one is feeling best and there are few distractions.
- Introduce the idea of an overnight visit to a long-term care facility or an extended afternoon visit to get a feel for the various available options.

6. Begin researching long-term care options in your area.

- Go to snapforseniors.com to access a nationwide senior housing database.
- Enter your city, state, zip or county and begin researching options by category of housing.
- View listings and use the "Request a Consultation" feature to contact communities of interest.
- Access the resources and tools that will help you when touring communities, figuring out costs and assembling a list of additional questions to ask.